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Toujours Diane

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Elizabeth Headley

TOUJOURS DIANE



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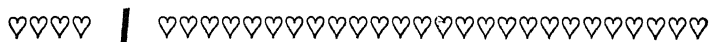
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Toujours D'iane



June Fever

THREE MORE DAYS OF SCHOOL!

Diane slumped on the end of her spine and stared dreamily out the classroom window at the glossy green maple leaves which moved faintly in the breeze.

June, a beautiful month, a romantic month, a month for endings and beginnings. Toby Cook would be graduating this Friday, marching down the aisle with the rest of the seniors in dignified cap and gown, looking grown up and ready for new worlds to conquer.

Diane sighed. It was strange and a little overwhelming to think of Toby going off to college in the fall. At least Jim would still be here for another year, but after that . . . She frowned, envisioning the break-up of her crowd, the inevitable parting.

Then she shook her shoulders and straightened her back. There was no use jumping the gun, after all. Not

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when a wonderful summer, with both boys right here in Cranford, was beckoning. She looked so alert and interested that Miss Twitchell asked her an unexpected question.

"I'm sorry," Diane apologized. "I'm afraid I wasn't listening."

The teacher sighed. Three more days of school!

An hour later Toby passed Diane a note all the way across study hall, through Christine White and Nonnie and Stubby Sawyer. "It's a swell day," he told her as though she didn't know it already. "Meet me after school and let's go for a walk in the great open spaces. I've got cabin fever but bad."

"Three o'clock on the side steps," Diane wrote back. "Me, too." She sighed again, rather tenderly. Jim was a darling, of course, and awfully convenient, living right next door, but she was going to miss Toby a lot.

There was something about Toby Cook that was definitely exciting, and it wasn't only his reckless blue eyes and black hair. It was the impact of a personality that every girl found compelling. Christine had tagged it when Toby first came to Cranford High. She said he had sex appeal.

Whatever it was, Diane found it irresistible. She hurried to meet him and walked away with him proudly, conscious of the envious glances of several of her less fortunate classmates. "Let's go out to the pond," he

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suggested. "I've got something to show you. A graduation present from my Dad."

"What is it?" Diane demanded at once, but Toby wouldn't tell her. "Wait till you see," he said, and caught her hand. "We're going to have a lot of time together this summer, aren't we? I mean, to play tennis and swim and stuff."

"Why, sure," Diane promised lightly. She smiled up at Toby with understanding. Their moods matched today. He was feeling prematurely nostalgic, too.

The sidewalk ended abruptly at the top of a slope, and they twisted down through the woods on a narrow path slippery with pine needles. Birds twittered overhead and late spring wildflowers peeped through last year's leaves. It was all familiar and pleasant and delightfully quiet after the hubbub of school.

The pond came into sight through the trees, calm and inviting below its steep banks. Diane and Toby scrambled downwards, dislodging pebbles which bounced and skittered before them. Then, at a clearing by the old boathouse, Toby stopped and pointed with pride to a bright green canoe racked up alongside several rowboats.

"Pretty?" he asked.

Diane gasped. "It's not yours?" She gazed at the sleek lines, the fresh unsullied paint, the sturdy lock and chain which secured it to the crossbar.

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Toby brought a key from his pocket with a grin. "I thought you'd be surprised."

Diane stood entranced, then began to plan aloud. "Why, we can take picnics up the creek and go swimming just anywhere!" She clasped her hands happily. "It'll be the best summer yet."

Toby brought paddles and cushions from the boat-house and together they slid the canoe into the water. "Is this her maiden voyage?" Diane wanted to know.

"Yep."

"My goodness, we should have a bottle of champagne or something."

"Come again."

"To christen it, like Queen Elizabeth," Diane replied a trifle ambiguously. "But then we might chip the paint on its prow."

"Bow," corrected Toby as he helped her in and waited while she settled herself on the forward seat. "Ready?" He pushed off.

Diane stroked the water languidly. "This is the life," she murmured. "I think your father is a very swell guy."

They circled the pond and paddled back just at sunset, then sat on the bank by the upturned canoe, reluctant to start back home. Diane hugged her knees and felt vaguely sentimental. Canoes were conducive to romance, she decided, and thought about what it might be like on a starry night.

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"Diane—"

"Mm?"

"Diane, there's something I'd like to ask you." Toby sounded so serious that she turned her head and regarded him with candid gray eyes.

"Ask me?"

The boy nodded, looking intense and rather embarrassed. He started to twist the class ring on his finger, then suddenly jerked it off. "I was wondering if maybe you'd like to wear this?" he asked, holding it forth.

Diane's eyes widened. She was taken completely by surprise. At one and the same time she felt flattered, anxious, hesitant. Any girl who wore Toby Cook's class ring would be considered lucky, but then wouldn't that be going steady? And what about Jim?

Meanwhile the ring lay in the palm of Toby's hand, so tangible that there seemed nothing else to do but pick it up and gaze at it while she tried to decide what she should do. To refuse it seemed rude, almost unfriendly, yet to accept it—? To what would she commit herself?

Sensing, and seeming to understand her hesitation, Toby said, "You don't have to decide right this minute. Take it home and think it over, Diane."

Because this suggestion offered at least a temporary solution, she agreed to it, knotting the ring in her handkerchief and putting it in her blouse pocket where it felt

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strangely hard and heavy. Before going to bed she wrapped it with adhesive tape, padding the back until it would fit her finger, then considered it for a long time, lying in bed with the light on and twisting it this way and that.

She liked Toby a lot, and it would be fun to wear his ring. It would give her prestige. But not two months ago she had insisted to Jim Roberts that she was not Toby's girl—that she was nobody's girl. Because she liked Jim a lot, too.

"I do like Jim," she whispered to Honey, her collie, who, against all family rules, was snuggled up against her in bed. Honey regarded his mistress fondly and thumped his tail in agreement. He liked Jim, too.

The next morning Diane strung the ring on a chain which had once held a gold locket and wore it around her neck inside her pink chambray shirt. She avoided Toby because she couldn't come to a decision. Although she didn't really feel that she should wear any boy's ring, she didn't quite know how to give it back.

That night, when Jim wandered over after dinner, she was especially gentle and sweet to him because the weight of the metal against her chest made her feel guilty. What had she been thinking of—taking it in the first place? She'd return it to Toby tomorrow, that's what she'd do.

"Want to walk down-town for a coke?" Jim suggested idly.

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Diane shook her head. "I'd rather take Honey for a run."

"That's fine by me." He whistled, and the big sable and white collie galloped up to them. These were his favorite people, and Jim's signal told him he was included in whatever they were planning to do.

By mutual agreement they climbed the hill that led to a vacant field and thence to a grove of birch trees from which they could look down on the sprawling town. Diane perched on the top rail of an old fence while Honey explored a creek with Jim's encouragement. "Woodchuck!" he told the collie. "Sick 'em, boy."

Honey wagged his tail vigorously but unearthed nothing larger than a field mouse. This he pursued with galumphing darts and dashes which availed him nothing. After a while Diane slid down from the fence and sat on the grass, leaning against a hillock while Jim sprawled beside her, chewing a blade of grass and enjoying the peacefulness of the twilight. "Gosh, it'll be good to be out of school," he said.

Nodding wordlessly, Diane agreed.

"It's going to be a great summer."

"Mmhm."

Jim lay back and regarded the pale sliver of a new moon in the twilight sky. "Every summer gets better, doesn't it?"

Diane nodded again.

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"I wonder if it will always be that way?"

Diane should have been warned by this philosophical turn of thought, rare enough in Jim to put her on guard. But she was feeling a little sleepy, far from alert to the implications of his sudden question. "Did you see our new class rings?"

It was customary for juniors to order their pins and rings at Easter and receive them at the end of the school term. As a matter of fact, Diane was quite unaware that they had been given out, so she said, "No. Oh, isn't that good-looking!" when Jim slipped the shiny band from his finger and presented it for inspection.

"Nifty, huh?"

"Very."

"Better than the senior rings, don't you think?"

Diane looked thoughtful, uncomfortably aware of Toby's hidden offering. "I think it's very handsome," she said sincerely. "I like the enamel work in the school colors especially."

She started to hand it back, when Jim's hand closed over hers. "I—I wish you'd keep it awhile and wear it—even just for the summer. I've been thinking I'd ask you to, for a long time."

If he hadn't sounded so boyish, so awkward, so completely genuine, Diane might have cried the first words that popped into her head. "Oh, I couldn't!" rose to her lips but she restrained herself with an effort. Jim looked so shy and hopeful, so flushed and anxious, that she

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couldn't bear to hurt his feelings. It would be like dashing the ring against the nearest rock.

She kept her eyes lowered, so that he couldn't discover her confusion. "It's awfully nice of you and everything, Jim, but really—"

Thrusting out his chin with unexpected belligerence, Jim looked straight at Diane when she finally glanced up and asked her, "Really what?"

"R—really," Diane stammered, holding the ring in the palm of her hand as gingerly as though it were a hot potato. "I don't know if I should. I mean, Mother and Dad mightn't like it. Or maybe your parents—have you thought of that?"

Jim's chin remained aggressive. "It's my ring," he said firmly. "I earned the money to buy it, so I guess I can give it to you if I want to. To you or anybody else."

Was this a veiled threat? Diane felt slightly frantic. But she managed to pick the word "give" out of the statement and repeat it. "I couldn't let you *give* it to me, Jim."

"Wear it, then, just for a while. Or don't you like me enough?"

Diane didn't know where to turn or what to say next. She felt as though Jim's penetrating, questioning glance could see beneath her primly collared blouse to the spot where Toby's ring rested on its makeshift chain.

"Of course I like you," she assured him. "Don't be

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ridiculous. But a boy's class ring—I don't know." She held it out to him. "Just let me think it over. Give me a couple of days."

Jim grinned suddenly. "Sure." But he closed her fingers around the shining circlet. "Think it over, Diane. But keep it until you decide. You don't have to wear it. Just keep it. There's no harm in that."

Diane felt trapped, but she appeared merely uncertain. "I might lose it," she suggested. "Please, you take it." Her eyes were dark with an emotion Jim misread. He shook his head and jumped to his feet, pulling her after him.

"It's as safe with you," he said, "as it is with me."

Thus, quite against her better judgment, Diane found herself walking to school the next morning with not one, but two class rings swinging heavily above her heart. She must give them both back—but how? To risk offending either Toby or Jim would be to risk ruining the entire summer. Self-absorbed, she was scarcely aware that Nonnie, her best friend, was hailing her from across the street.

"Hi, Diane! Wait a sec, can't you?"

"Oh, hi," Diane said gloomily when Nonnie had dodged through the early morning traffic wending its way toward the station.

"What's the matter?" Nonnie wanted to know. "You look as though you've lost your last friend."

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"It's just the opposite," Diane confessed with a wry smile. "Nonnie, do you remember when we used to simply yearn to be popular?"

"I still do," said Nonnie succinctly.

Diane shook her head. "Popularity is for the birds."

"Tell me all," suggested Nonnie, her eyes glistening with interest. "Or have you decided to become the mysterious type?"

Though confession was tempting, Diane considered for a minute. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die."

"You promise!"

"Absolutely!"

"Well," admitted Diane with a sigh that sounded as though it came straight out of a Victorian melodrama, "Monday afternoon Toby asked me to wear his class ring."

Clapping her hands spontaneously, Nonnie cried, "Oh, how terribly exciting!" Then she sobered. "But that means you'd be practically going steady. What about Jim?"

"That's just it. Last night Jim asked me to wear his ring."

"And you had to decide." Nonnie's tone indicated that she understood fully the predicament in which Diane had found herself. "Which one did you take?"

Gulping, Diane said, "Both."

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"Both?" Nonnie was incredulous.

"Sh!"

"But Diane, you couldn't."

"I did, though." Slowing her pace so that she could tell the whole story before they reached school, Diane filled in the picture. "I feel just awful, and I don't know what to do."

"Where have you got them?" Nonnie asked practically.

Diane touched the front of her blouse. "Here. Around my neck on a chain."

"Good grief," murmured her best friend in honest concern. "This is the end, the absolute end. You've got to figure out a way to give them back."

"As if I haven't been trying. But Toby has this marvelous new canoe, and you know he's apt to be fickle. Look at Holly Harper, last year."

"But you can't keep on playing both ends against the middle," Nonnie said sternly. "Neither Jim nor Toby will stand for it. You've got to make a choice."

Diane tossed her head like a recalcitrant pony. "I don't see why." But she did see, of course. She remembered, all too vividly, the fist-fight between Jim and Toby in April, of which she, far more than Honey, had been the cause.

Nonnie sensibly ignored the remark. "You've got to think of something terribly tactful," she said. But though

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she puckered her brow in concentration, nothing suitable occurred to her. The girls parted reluctantly for their separate home rooms without coming to any conclusion at all.

Because school was all but over, classes ended at noon. Diane and Nonnie walked part way home together, worrying, but neither had a bright idea. "Come on over after lunch," Nonnie finally suggested, and Diane agreed gloomily. "All right."

Honey greeted his mistress waggishly, dancing down the front walk to meet her, but Diane patted the dog with an absent-minded expression and almost closed the front door on his nose. From the hall she could see both her mother and father seated at the dining room table, with maps and travel folders spread across its surface in colorful disarray.

Since it was Wednesday, her father's presence was unprecedented. "Why—why what are you doing home, Daddy?" she asked in unaffected astonishment.

Mr. Graham glanced up from the map he was studying and grinned. "We've got a big surprise for you," he announced, his deep voice full of anticipation. "I've got to go abroad on business, and I'm going to take you and your mother along!"

"Abroad—you mean to Europe?" Diane could scarcely believe her ears.

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Both Mr. and Mrs. Graham smiled and nodded. "That's right," her father said happily.

"But I don't want to go to Europe!" Diane wailed. She stood in the doorway, appalled, and contemplated the litter of travel literature with stricken eyes. The dream of a beautiful summer, the best summer of her life, began to waver and fade. "I don't want to. Do I have to?" she asked.

The shine faded from her mother's eyes. She looked both troubled and aggrieved. "Why on earth not, dear?" she asked gently. "It's a wonderful opportunity, and you're just the right age."

"Of course she is," Gordon Graham agreed promptly in a no-nonsense tone of voice. "A trip like this will be extremely educational."

There was a forward-moving certainty in the way he spoke that made Diane's heart plummet to the soles of her flat slippers. Though she recognized at this moment that the trip was a foregone conclusion, she felt compelled to wage open rebellion. "Sixteen is *not* the right age!" she insisted hotly. "I have my summer all planned." Deliberately avoiding the mention of boys, she started to explain. "I'm going to play on the junior tennis team, and go swimming with the gang, and—"

"Fiddlesticks," her father cut in. Leaning back in his chair, his eyes began to crinkle with amusement. "You did those things last year and you can do them next

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year, but this summer you're going to have an experience that will last a lifetime. You wait and see!"

But the shock was as yet too great to sustain. "I'm getting enough experience right here!" Diane wailed. Turning and running upstairs to her room, she slammed the door and flung herself across the bed to weep frustrated tears. Then, gradually, she became conscious of an uncomfortable lump pressing against her breastbone, and she turned over and drew forth the rings, Toby's and Jim's, to contemplate them mistily.

It made her feel sick at her stomach, to think of what could happen during her absence, of the girls who would be all too anxious to console either of her swains. Why couldn't parents remember what it was like to be young? Why, if they loved her at all, would they let a little thing like a trip to Europe stand in the way of her happiness? Gritting her teeth, Diane asked aloud the unanswerable question. "Why?"

It was as though the spoken word broke the spell of her misery. Suddenly she sat up and dashed away the tears with the back of a hand. A rueful smile began to curve the corners of her lips and she reached around and unclasped the chain that held the two heavy rings.

"At least," she said aloud, "Europe is the perfect answer to these."

Bon Voyage, Díane!

DIANE WASHED HER FACE, POWDERED HER NOSE, BRUSHED her hair and applied fresh lipstick in the tragic manner of a French queen preparing for the guillotine. Never had she felt so dramatic, but then never before had she been faced with the prospect of going to Europe, combined with the necessity of returning to two boys, two class rings.

Not that she intended to take care of this latter obligation immediately. First she wanted to tell Nonnie about Europe—to savor her best friend's reaction to the bursting of this new bombshell which was positively atomic in comparison to the lesser explosion of her morning confession that she was carrying around both Jim Roberts' and Toby Cook's rings.

With Honey at her heels, Diane went out into the early afternoon sunshine of Beechtree Road. The very

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familiarity of the scene brought on a new wave of self-pity. The cars parked in the several drives, the iris blooming in the Roberts' side yard, the familiar façades of the stone and clapboard houses all seemed to Diane especially comfortable and dozy. Bobby Adams, riding towards town on his outgrown bike, flung her a brief hello, and old Mrs. Blodgett, out for an afternoon stroll, nodded and wagged her cane cheerfully from across the street, unaware that Diane was a tragic heroine about to mount a tumbril in the shape of a boat to Europe.

Yet the shiver that traced its way down Diane's spine was already more excited than apprehensive, and it was hard to compose her features and look properly wretched when she turned up Nonnie's front walk.

That she was a convincing actress was attested to by Nonnie's immediate question. "What's happened now? Not Honey—?"

Diane shook her head and indicated the collie passing the time of day with a cocker several houses down the street. "It's my father."

"Your father?" Nonnie sounded truly shocked.

"He's not dead or anything," Diane explained hastily. "But he has to go to Europe on a business trip and he's going to drag Mother and me along with him. I'll miss the whole summer—everything!" She considered it superfluous to mention, at this moment, either Jim Roberts or Toby Cook.

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"But that's marvelous!" Nonnie was crying, dreamy-eyed. "Where will you go? England, Italy?"

"Oh, all over," Diane said vaguely. "France mostly, I think. Daddy has to visit some factories or something in Paris and a place spelled B-L-O-I-S. You know, business."

Nonnie clasped her hands. "Paris," she breathed. "How absolutely and completely thrilling! Think of the things you'll see—and the boys you'll meet!"

"Boys?" murmured Diane. The only boys who counted, her expression said, were right here in Cranford.

"Of course, silly!"

"But I don't speak French."

"You will," Nonnie assured her. "You'll learn. Oh, Diane, you'll come back so—so sophisticated, you'll be the envy of our whole crowd."

This was an entirely new angle. Diane looked at her friend in wonder, then in contemplation. The trip abroad began to look a lot less dismal. In fact she was rather ashamed that she had objected at all. "Daddy says it will be very educational," she murmured. "Maybe he's got something there." Then she giggled. "You haven't mentioned the most important thing of all, Nonnie."

"What's that?"

"Think of the out it gives me with Toby and Jim."

Together, sitting on the side steps, they planned the

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strategy for returning the rings. Nonnie agreed that Diane should sound moderately doleful, but she was of the opinion that both boys would consider her a very lucky girl.

Jim, whom Diane met on her way back home, reacted properly when Diane told him the news. "Of course I'll miss all the gang like anything," she admitted, "but it does sound sort of thrilling, don't you think?"

"Thrilling? I think it sounds absolutely tops! But gosh, it won't seem right without you next door. Who am I going to take to the movies, and to summer formals at the club?"

Somebody grim, somebody perfectly ghastly, Diane hoped, but she didn't say so. Instead, she countered with another question. "Jim—?"

"Yeah."

"I was wondering if you'd keep Honey for me? He's practically half your dog anyway, and I'd feel better, leaving and all."

"Sure!" Jim agreed at once, bending to fondle the collie's ears. "Heck, you couldn't put our boy in a kennel. Not old Honey-pot here."

Diane sighed thankfully, aware that this was one tie which would bind Jim to her. You couldn't keep a girl's dog without thinking about a girl pretty often, even though you might be dancing with somebody else on Saturday nights.

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It proved not too difficult, before they parted, to return Jim's ring. The note of regret in Diane's voice was completely genuine. "Under the circumstances," she explained, "it just wouldn't be right."

Jim bounced the ring up and down in his hand as though he didn't know quite what to do with it. He was frowning so unhappily that Diane reached out and touched his arm. "It won't be for long," she told him. "Only two months."

"Two months is all of July and August," Jim muttered gloomily, and Diane was reminded that only a few hours ago she had been telling her parents exactly the same thing.

Now, unaccountably, Jim's very dejection made her spirits lift. Maybe all her fears that some other girl would steal her place were groundless. Maybe, as Nonnie promised, she would come back with a new aura of glamour that, as the travel magazines suggested, only a trip abroad could give.

But two months began to seem like two years when she was faced with returning the ring to Toby. Jim had been the boy-next-door ever since Diane could remember, and therefore he seemed old-shoe and reliable, but Toby was something else again. In the first place, he was comparatively new to Cranford, and extraordinarily good-looking, to boot. His worldliness, combined with an endearing smile, had captivated other hearts than

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Diane's. Now, with a shiny new canoe and a summer moon to light up the sky, who could tell what might happen? It was with a good deal of reluctance that she told him about her family's plans.

They were walking over to Christine's that evening to play badminton, and Diane brought up the subject of Europe in a manner which was almost offhand. She'd have to pin her hopes on the fact that distance and a few warm-hearted letters would lend enchantment, but she had a presentiment that what she needed very badly was a safety catch on the pin.

Toby was not nearly as excited for her as Nonnie, nor did he seem quite as devastated by the prospect of her absence as Jim. "Sounds fun," he admitted promptly, but then grinned impishly. "Also sounds as if I'd have to find me another girl."

"I've got a couple I could recommend," Diane told him.

"Buck-teethed and bowlegged, I expect," Tobey shot back.

"How did you guess?"

"I'm bright that way. Other ways too. I've a feeling you're about to give me back my ring."

At the last moment Diane hedged. "Do you want it?"

"Not really. On the other hand the Atlantic is mighty broad."

"Deep, too," Diane reminded him. She thrust forth the

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ring rather ruefully. "Maybe you'll want to keep the adhesive tape on for the next girl," she suggested, but Toby refused to be baited. He just laughed and whistled a tune Diane recognized.

*"But I'm always true to you, darlin', in my fashion.
Yes, I'm always true to you, darlin', in my way."*

"True in your fashion," murmured Diane. "I'll just bet."

But she couldn't get really mad at Toby. He was too appealing, and his foolishness always made her laugh. Besides, the fact that the rings were no longer in her possession was a decided relief. Never again in her life, she promised herself, would she lack the courage to say no. Never would she let herself in for anything so potentially embarrassing. The next time, she was sure, she would be able to decide. It would be either Jim or Toby, but not both, from the time she returned.

Of course it was quite obvious that, next fall, it would have to be Jim, because Toby would be off to college and dateable only during vacations. Life would be smoother, she had to admit, but far less interesting. Toby was such a doll!

In a confidential mood, she told her mother about the contretemps of the rings the next morning while they were doing the breakfast dishes together, but Mrs. Graham, faced with the job of closing the house and as-

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sembling and packing clothes for Europe within a fortnight's time, listened only absent-mindedly.

"It will be good for you to get away from Cranford for a while," she murmured half to herself. "You need a sense of perspective. Your father is right."

"Grown-ups!" muttered Diane in her turn, and considered the fact that she and her parents would be thrown upon each other's company more closely than ever before during this European jaunt. Mr. Graham was planning to pick up a small car in England in which they were to tour, and the brightest spot on Diane's horizon was that she might be allowed to drive occasionally. But the thought of being closeted with her mother and father day after day was rather dismaying. Grown-ups and teen-agers, in Diane's language, did not mix. You loved, honored and attempted to obey your parents, but they weren't exactly keen fun.

However, she didn't have time to explore this point of view with her mother. The telephone rang, the cleaner's truck pulled up outside, and from that moment on the tempo of the Graham household accelerated to a new high.

"Yes, yes, YES!" Mrs. Graham was heard to exclaim. "Isn't it wonderful? We're sailing the twenty-eighth of June. If we can ever get off!"

During the next fortnight Diane's life was a whirl. While her parents became immersed in a mass of detail

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involving reservations, passports, hotel accommodations and the hiring of the car, Diane went off swimming or to the tennis club with the gang, thoroughly enjoying the envious glances which came her way and acquiring, quite undeservedly, a new prestige.

"Think of all the new clothes you'll be getting," Alice James yearned. Both Alice and Sarah Jane Corwin were going to Camp Minnehaha as junior counselors and the prospect of spending seven weeks surrounded by mosquitoes, small children, and poison ivy was looking less attractive every day.

Diane turned Alice's remark to good account with Toby when he phoned to ask her to go to a dog show the next day. "I'll have to see," she told him. "Mother may want me to go shopping. If we dress every night on ship-board, I'll need some evening things."

As a matter of fact, one short summer dance frock and a new blue flannel jacket and skirt were the only purchases made to complete Diane's travel wardrobe. Mrs. Graham decreed that her present clothes were entirely adequate and that Americans dressed better than most Europeans, anyway.

Diane accepted this point of view philosophically. By now her original qualms had given way to a growing sense of anticipation, and as the sailing date approached, more and more invitations for luncheon or dinner at the homes of her friends kept pouring in. "It's like having a

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birthday every day," she confessed to Nonnie as they came into the Graham house late one afternoon. "It's really heaps of fun."

"Speaking of birthdays," mentioned her mother as she hurried upstairs with an armful of freshly laundered clothes, "there's a package on the kitchen table from your Aunt Hope. And incidentally, she writes that she's taken a job."

"A job? Aunt Hope?"

Mrs. Graham nodded. "In a very fashionable dress shop in Washington. Doesn't that sound interesting?"

"Very," agreed Diane as she started toward the kitchen. "And I suppose that means Holly can get clothes practically at cost."

Nonnie laughed. "Trust Holly!" Diane's cousin Henrietta was the envy of every girl in Cranford. On her occasional visits she had proven so attractive that she was a well-remembered threat.

Diane was already unwrapping a small box. "A charm bracelet!" she cried, and held up a slender gold chain to which a miniature ship was attached.

Nonnie inspected it with interest. "It's lovely," she said, "And what a neat idea!"

From that moment on, Diane wore the bracelet proudly, displaying it to both Jim and Toby in turn. If the boys accorded the bauble more than passing interest, Diane was too excited to notice. This was Monday, and

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the Grahams were to sail on Saturday from New York.

The days continued to speed, against all rules because anticipation should have made them drag. Tuesday night Diane had a date with Toby, Wednesday with Jim, and on Thursday she was invited to Alice James' house for dinner while her parents met some business associates of Mr. Graham's in town.

"Just family," Alice had mentioned when she asked Diane to come over, and "Make it early if you can. Around six o'clock."

So Diane, saving her better dresses for the trip, unearthed a rather faded checked gingham which was more than slightly outgrown. But she tied a ribbon in her hair, applied a matching pink lipstick, and went off feeling that she'd "do."

The James' house, when she arrived, seemed almost preternaturally quiet. Instead of opening the door and shouting "Hi there!" as usual, she felt impelled to ring the bell.

Alice, looking a trifle flushed, materialized from the shadows of the hallway to greet her, but instead of leading the way to the terrace, insisted that Diane come down to the basement playroom—"to see what I've got there."

"It's pretty dark down here," Diane complained as she started to descend the stairs. "Can't we switch on a lamp?"

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As though this were a given signal, the playroom burst into a blaze of light. "Surprise!" shouted a dozen voices, and Diane almost tumbled down the last four steps into the arms of her waiting friends.

They were all there—Toby and Jim and Nonnie and the others, the "gang" with which Diane had grown up, the group which grew doubly dear with every passing year. Diane was not only completely surprised, she was quite overcome. A mist of tears clouded her eyes and, although she smiled valiantly, she had to fight for self-control. Gone was the dramatic figure of the past fortnight. She was once more a very young girl, touched because her friends loved her and unable to do more than stammer, "Why—why—"

Alice and her cohorts had gone to a lot of trouble over the decorations. The walls were hung with travel posters and the rafters with paper flags of France, Switzerland, England and several other European countries. A long buffet table was laid for supper, and steaks were ready to broil on the fireplace grill. Somebody started the record player which had been loaded with French dance music, and the party was launched.

But the climax didn't come until after dinner when Alice, who had disappeared upstairs with a tray of dishes, staggered down again laden with a large box wrapped in gift paper from which floated streamers of ribbon on which Sarah Jane had painted "*Bon Voyage!*"

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Diane, flushed and delighted to be the center of attention, sat down in the middle of the floor and opened it, to find the carton crowded with smaller parcels from each of the guests.

"The big ones first," Alice commanded. "Work your way down to the small ones. It's more fun."

The biggest of all was almost the size of a hat box. Inside it was another box, carefully wrapped, and inside this still another. "I know this game!" Diane laughed. "The present will be a thimble in the smallest box of all—and I can't sew!"

This was almost, but not quite, the case. The smallest box was very small, indeed, but there was no thimble. Instead, she found a tiny gold heart on the outside of which was engraved "*Bon Voyage, Diane!*" and on the inside of which—for it was a locket—was a small but smiling snapshot of Toby Cook.

It was such an unexpectedly sentimental gift that Diane was momentarily embarrassed. "For my charm bracelet!" she cried, shutting the locket before anyone could see the snapshot. "It's perfectly lovely, isn't it? I adore it!" Holding it aloft and smiling almost impartially at the company, she allowed her glance to rest on Toby for only a fraction of a second longer than on the rest.

"But who gave it to you?" Christine wanted to know.

Diane came to a quick decision. "I'm not going to

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tell," she said impishly. "A charm bracelet is more fun if it's a secret, don't you think?"

Her eyes happened to catch Jim's in passing, and the smile he gave her was unexpectedly tender, but the next moment she had forgotten it in the excitement of unwrapping another gift.

This drew a general laugh, because Stubby Sawyer had painstakingly assembled a medicine kit compounded of remedies for *mal-de-mer*, snake bite, traveler's complaint, sleeplessness and a good many other diseases with which Diane was most unlikely to be stricken but for which fictitious medicines were recommended. Nonnie, eminently practical, had bought her a plastic cosmetic case and Christine's neatly wrapped present was a clothesline which needed no pins.

Diane opened package after package, hooting at a collection of second-hand books on navigation and marine engines which Randy Curtis had taken pains to discover and thanking Sarah Jane warmly for a new compact decorated with tiny sea shells. Finally, only two small boxes remained. One, bearing a miniscule card from Mr. James, Alice's father, contained a police whistle which he hoped would come in handy. The last box, even smaller, Diane opened with a show of reluctance.

"I don't want the party to be over," she murmured. "I want it to go on and on."

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Then she gasped. Inside the smallest box was a heart identical to Toby's. This, too, was a locket, and this, too, was inscribed with "*Bon voyage, Diane!*" though in script instead of block letters. She took it out of its nest of tissue very slowly and opened it, holding it sheltered by her hands so that no one else could see the snapshot inside, but of course she knew whose face she would find.

Jim's.

Then she grinned because it wasn't a boy's head, but a collie's, which was fitted behind the tiny glass guard. How very like him, she thought to herself. And how very sweet.

But when she glanced up to thank him, forgetting her earlier plan to keep her charms secret, Jim and Toby were glaring at one another angrily and she realized that each knew the battle was again a draw.

"Thank you, thank you, THANK YOU!" she shouted, jumping to her feet. "I love you all, every single one of you. And I think you're the very best friends a girl ever had."

But to Nonnie she whispered privately. "Two identical hearts. Imagine! I'm back right where I started with the two class rings. Now what am I going to do?"

"Wear them both, of course," advised her best friend, "and collect a few more hearts in Europe to soften the blow."

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stewards searched out staterooms for the throng of passengers and for the friends who were seeing people off.

Diane and Jim went exploring as soon as they could break away from their parents.

"Why, it's like a big hotel afloat!" exclaimed Diane ecstatically.

Jim was equally impressed. He viewed the swimming pool, the gym, the ping-pong tables and deck tennis courts with approbation. "Look here, there's even a movie," he said as he opened a door to a theater. "Boy, do I envy you!"

"I wish you were coming," Diane said sincerely. Jim's lean young face and rumpled hair looked homely and familiar. When he was gone she was sure she would feel utterly lost in this strange new world.

Jim squeezed her arm. "Write me."

"I will."

"I'm going to miss you like everything."

"Me, too."

Jim grinned. "Don't take up with any of these smooth Frenchies, now!"

"How could I? They wouldn't understand me."

"Phooey," snorted Jim. "There's an international language I've heard about."

Diane's chuckle was drowned in the blowing of the first "all-ashore" whistle, and the pair started reluctantly back to the Grahams' stateroom where the adults were

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laughing and talking and passing farewell telegrams from hand to hand.

Then, in a flurry of good wishes and good-bys, they all went on deck and the Roberts joined the group of visitors going back across the gangplank to wait and wave from the pier as the tugs pulled the great ship out into the river toward the Statue of Liberty.

Jim had edged to a place at the front of the crowd where Diane could see him from her spot at the rail. "Good-by!" she shouted, although she knew he couldn't hear her. "Take good care of Honey!" And it seemed to her that Jim smiled and saluted as though he understood.

All of a sudden, the whistles tooting, the flags flying, the handkerchiefs and scarves waving, the huge vessel being borne majestically to sea, and Jim—her Jim—a mere speck among a kaleidoscopic throng, made Diane feel as though she were sailing away forever instead of for two brief months. Life, in that moment, became too breath-taking to bear. Her own smallness, her youth and inexperience, made her tremble. Abruptly, mumbling some lame excuse to her parents, she turned and fled.

It was on her way downstairs from the promenade deck that Diane ran into Peter Crowell. Her head tucked down to conceal her confusion, she butted him like a young ram, then stopped to apologize and looked up into the amused face of a tall, lanky boy with sun-bleached straight hair and dark brown eyes. He was

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wearing Bermuda shorts and an open-necked shirt and looked as at home on shipboard as though he were in his own back yard.

"Hello," he said casually. "Going somewhere?"

"Not really."

Then may I come with you?"

Diane looked so surprised that his grin broadened. "You might get lost," he warned, "if you go wandering around alone. Besides, I'm looking for a partner for deck tennis. Would you like a game?"

"But—but shouldn't we be unpacking, or waving at the Statue of Liberty, or something more—?" Diane hesitated, searching for the proper word.

"More important? We have five days to unpack, and we can pay our respects to Miss Liberty in passing. Oh, come along!" the boy urged.

"Can you wait five minutes while I change?"

"OK."

"You're not American, are you?" Diane asked, aware of a difference in inflection.

"No. English. My name's Peter Crowell. What's yours?"

"Diane Graham."

"How do you do." Peter thrust out a hand and they shook with mock formality. "Want statistics? I'm coming from a year in the U.S. as an exchange student. Age—

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seventeen, residence—London. No bad habits. Popular with parents—"

"Stop!" cried Diane. "I'm breathless!"

"Saved by the gong." Peter grinned. "Now that we've been formally introduced, I'll be watching the clock on the sun deck." He stepped past her and disappeared up the stairs.

Diane was rummaging through her suitcase when Mrs. Graham appeared in the stateroom. She looked mildly concerned. "Are you all right, dear?"

Diane turned and smiled. "Oh, perfectly," she said. "I've just met an awfully nice boy and we're going to play deck tennis in five minutes if I can ever find my shorts!"

It was an auspicious beginning. Later, Diane thanked her lucky stars that she had become choked up with emotion at precisely the right time. Otherwise, on such a big ship, it might have been days before Peter crossed her path. There was even the outside possibility that she might never have met him at all.

Because there were other girls on the ship. There was a willowy blonde called Muriel Something and a brunette with great gray eyes who was fascinatingly French and who looked divine in a very brief swimming suit. Her name was Mimi, and she posed decoratively at the edge of the pool watching Diane dive without a trace of

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envy. Mimi seldom went in the water, but when she did, she slid in lazily and swam without getting her hair wet. which Diane considered sissy to the extreme.

She made the mistake of saying so to Peter when they were sitting together at a small table by the pool having a pre-luncheon coke. It was the second day out, and already she felt that she knew him well enough to be completely candid. But his reaction took her by surprise.

"I think she's quite attractive," he said. "You have to admit that French girls have something."

"What?"

"Allure."

Diane said nothing.

"They're trained from the cradle to fascinate a man," added Peter with a decidedly worldly air.

"How do you know?"

"My grandmother says so. By the way, you'd like my grandmother, Diane. She lives in Paris. Have I told you about her?"

But Diane wouldn't let him drop the original subject. "I don't know why boys shouldn't be trained to fascinate women. Seems just as sensible."

"But unnecessary. Men are just naturally fascinating to women." As though he anticipated a spontaneous reaction to such a quick retort, Peter dodged an imaginary blow.

"Men—and boys too—can be terrible egotists," Diane

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muttered, but she began to watch Mimi covertly, trying to discover what made her tick. Was her allure in the way in which she turned her head, in the manner in which the small gold earrings swung from her pierced ears? Did it lie in her slow smile or in the upward glance from under her dark lashes? Allure. It was an interesting word. She went to the ship's library and looked it up in the dictionary.

"To attract by the offer of some real or apparent good; tempt by something flattering or acceptable." Diane read the definition twice, but it didn't throw much light on the subject.

If she wanted to understand allure it was quite obvious that the thing to do was make an intensive study of Mimi, and with characteristic directness Diane pursued this course as soon as opportunity offered. At the Grahams' table in the dining room there was seated a young French hairdresser named Armand Lassiat and, although Diane had been so taken up with Peter that she had rather discounted him, she was aware that he was one of the group of men and boys who surrounded the French girl whenever she appeared.

At lunch, therefore, Diane approached him. "I've seen you talking to Mimi, the French girl. She seems very attractive."

"I'll say she is!" cut in Gordon Graham, and both his wife and daughter glanced at him sharply.

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"I wonder how old she is?" Diane's mother asked, half to herself. "She seems young to be traveling alone."

"She is eighteen," offered Armand in his careful English. "She has been a model in New York for a year and now she returns to Paris." He pronounced it "Paree."

"A model, eh?" repeated Mr. Graham. "With that figure I don't wonder."

"Daddy!" said Diane in an embarrassed tone.

But Armand put his fingers to his lips and kissed them, and the two men smiled across the table at each other.

Allure, decided Diane as she watched them, is something every girl should get.

After lunch, Diane ignored Peter's signal from across the dining room and stuck close to Armand. At this point, she decided, she could use an older men in her life. "Isn't this a nifty ship?" she asked him as they walked upstairs together. "Are you having fun?"

"*Mais oui!*" replied the young Frenchman. "Of course. One always has fun when one is not working. Is that not so?"

"I haven't worked much," Diane confessed. "Except as a baby-sitter."

"A what?"

"A sitter." Then, taking one look at Armand's puzzled face, she burst out laughing. "It's an American expression that isn't worth explaining. Do you play ping-pong? I'm pining for a game."

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To Diane's surprise, Armand said yes, he did, and they managed to find a free table. The first game proved that he not only played, but played very well indeed. He beat his partner twenty-one to fourteen.

"Whew!" Diane breathed. "You're good. You'd better go in the tournament."

As they were changing sides, Mimi strolled past and Armand smiled and spoke with obvious pleasure. "*Bonjour, Mademoiselle!*"

"*Bonjour,*" replied the French girl with a nod. Then she asked Diane, "May I stay and watch you?"

Diane held out her paddle. "I wish you'd play. Armand's too fast for me."

But Mimi drew back. "I am afraid I am quite hopeless at games," she murmured. Her voice was low and her accent had less nasal twang than Armand's, Diane noticed, but there was nothing outstanding about it, nothing husky or dramatic, nothing to indicate that she possessed allure. She stood and watched quietly while Armand won two more quick games. Then Diane gave up. "I'll have to find you a more interesting partner," she told the young Frenchman. "I'm completely outclassed."

"Ah, but all men enjoy winning," Mimi said gently. "Isn't that true, Armand?"

"It is—*vraiment,*" Armand agreed with a nod. To Diane he said, "Tomorrow I shall teach you some new

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strokes. You will become more expert quickly. Wait and see."

Together the three walked up to the sun deck, where Mimi sought out her deck chair and Diane went looking for her parents. "I met Mimi," she told her mother. "She's sort of quiet. And she doesn't play games. Don't you think that's rather odd?"

"Maybe she has never had the opportunity to learn," suggested Mrs. Graham, glancing up from her book and leaning her head against the cushioned back of the chair.

"All girls aren't the athletic type," muttered Diane's father with his eyes closed.

Diane turned so that her face would be in the sun and felt its hot sting against her cheeks. "I think I'll go for another swim," she mentioned. "Be seeing you."

The first night out no one had dressed, but tonight the men appeared in dark suits or dinner jackets and the women in appropriate dresses. Diane changed from shorts and a shirt into a full-skirted starched lace frock which had been her pride and joy last summer and which still looked almost new. It was white and crisp, becoming against her tan, and she wore scarlet slippers with it and tied back her hair with a matching red velvet bow.

After dinner there was dancing in the salon and Diane

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glanced around hopefully in search of Peter, but discovered him sitting at a table with Mimi, Armand, and an older couple she did not know. Rather primly, therefore, she stayed with her parents, who were joined by some shipboard acquaintances, a California couple named Anderson who were on their way to Copenhagen. They were pleasant people and they made a special effort to include Diane in their conversation, but Diane's glance kept straying to the table where Mimi and the others were sitting.

"Join your friends if you want to, dear," Mrs. Graham suggested, but Diane shook her head. She wanted to be invited; she didn't feel privileged to break in.

Armand danced with Mimi, who wore a simple black chiffon dress cut on classic lines that did full justice to her beautiful figure. The French girl didn't seem very animated, and again Diane wondered what it was that men found so captivating about her. She wasn't that pretty. And she certainly wasn't terribly gay!

Mr. Graham danced with his wife, then came back to the table and insisted that Diane dance with him, too, although she said, "Oh, Daddy, I don't want to, really. I'm feeling a little squeamish. It's the motion, I guess."

"Nonsense," said her father. "What you need is some exercise. Why, the ship is hardly rolling at all."

It was impossible for Diane to explain that she would be conspicuous barging around the floor with her own

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father, who always danced with a furious concentration which permitted no interchange. She prayed silently that Peter would notice and cut in on her, but he sat by, looking relaxed and unconcerned.

Finally, the music stopped and Diane turned thankfully back to the table where her mother and the Andersons were talking to a stranger—a short hunchbacked man whom Diane had noticed when he came into the dining room at lunch time. He was introduced as Mr. Martin and Diane observed, as she nodded and murmured “How-do-you-do,” that he came only to her shoulder although his twisted frame was broad-shouldered and his eyes bright and surprisingly young.

How awful, she thought, how tragic but how perfectly terrible, to look like that, to have to live within such a body. What a nuisance that he had to join their party. Why couldn’t he have been someone interesting? She sat as far away from him as possible and gazed in the other direction, toward the door.

The orchestra began to play again and several couples moved out to the floor, among them Mimi and Peter Crowell. Mr. Graham leaned toward his daughter and whispered with fatherly tactlessness. “I see the little French girl has copped your beau.”

“He isn’t my beau,” Diane hissed back, and felt more ill-at-ease than ever, like a butterfly pinned beneath a piece of glass. She’d give herself ten more minutes, and

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if none of the younger crowd came to rescue her, she'd make an excuse and go to bed.

But this decision in itself was alarming. She didn't want to go to bed. She wanted to dance with Peter and Armand and some of the other young men and have fun. She wanted to feel popular again, and sought after, as she had during the past few weeks in Cranford. As she had felt this very morning, swimming with Peter Crowell! As she had felt, for that matter, until she had allowed herself to be trapped in this awkward situation, stuck with a bunch of older people when she should have seen to it that she would be invited to join Peter and his group. Diane seethed because it was her own fault, partly. She shouldn't have been so complacent, so self-assured.

Fretting, she failed to notice that Mr. Martin had risen and was rounding the table toward her, moving with his clumsy, ungraceful gait. He stopped at her chair and smiled, with the shy, anxious expression of a puppy not too sure of his reception by a person he admires, but Diane was blind to its appeal. She only knew, as she broke out in cold perspiration, what he was about to ask.

"Will you dance with me?" he invited, and the smile stayed on his face, frozen, as he read the rejection in her eyes.

"Please excuse me. I'm not feeling very well."

"Oh, I'm sorry. That's perfectly all right." He edged back to his chair and sat down.

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Diane realized that her mother, deep in conversation with Mr. Anderson, had not noticed the incident, but her father was frowning, and he made a special effort to direct the conversation toward Mr. Martin, turning his back on Diane.

She felt a flush of shame creep up her throat to her face and pushed back her chair hastily. "I'll be back in a few minutes," she murmured to nobody in particular and, hoping that she might give the impression of being really ill, hurried out of the room.

The cabin, when she reached it, seemed stuffy and oppressively hot. Diane applied fresh lipstick and powder, recombined her hair, and waited for fifteen minutes, then went back timidly to the salon.

A glance told her that Mr. Martin was no longer at their table and she sighed thankfully and started to enter the door. Then Peter Crowell, unaccountably, was at her elbow. "Hi," he greeted her enthusiastically. "How about a dance?"

Diane nodded, and the boy took her hand and mentioned as he led her to the now crowded floor, "I was just coming over for you when you disappeared."

Diane repeated the thin excuse. "I wasn't feeling very well."

"All right now?"

"Yes, thanks." She smiled almost naturally.

But then, caught in the crush of dancers, she noticed

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Mimi, whose partner—and Diane could scarcely believe her eyes—was Mr. Martin. He was dancing awkwardly with a strange, bouncy motion, but Mimi—although she was so much taller that she looked ridiculous—was smiling down into his eyes.

Diane followed Peter's lead automatically, completely nonplussed. She lost sight of the ill-assorted pair and then discovered them again, and saw that Mimi was not embarrassed, that her manner with Mr. Martin was quite unself-conscious. She was talking and laughing with him quite naturally, as though she were thoroughly enjoying herself.

"Come and join us?" Peter invited when the music stopped, and Diane followed him quietly, as though she were in a trance.

In a moment Mimi slipped into a chair next to the newcomer and greeted her pleasantly but without effusiveness, while Mr. Martin went back to his own table, alone.

"A coke, Diane, or a ginger ale?"

"No, thank you, Peter. Not right now." Diane was thinking, thinking with unaccustomed absorption. She was remembering the dictionary definition of the word "allure."

"To attract by the offer of some real or apparent good."

Those were the exact words, and now she understood

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their meaning. She also understood why the French girl sitting beside her charmed one and all, the handsome and the ugly, the boys and the older men.

Mimi's "good," Diane recognized, was real, her allure was more than skin-deep.

And the shame that had made Diane blush now made her take stock of herself, and she knew that there was something she must do, no matter how hard it would be.

When the music started again she murmured, "Excuse me for a few minutes please" to Peter and stood up on her scarlet heels with legs that trembled. But with her head held high she worked her way in among the tables until she reached the one at which Mr. Martin sat.

"I'm feeling much better," she said. "I was wondering if now we might have that dance."

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Diane's eyes brightened. "Thank you, Daddy. I'm sure it will be plenty." She preened a little, feeling trustworthy and mature.

Mr. Graham had to go to Southend on business, and Mrs. Graham had been invited to lunch with an old school friend who was spending the summer near Henley. She had planned to take her daughter along, but a phone call from Peter Crowell, the English boy who had given Diane a bit of a whirl on shipboard, had intervened. Now, as she pulled on her short white gloves, she looked so apprehensive that Diane burst out laughing.

"Take care," she teased as she walked over to kiss her mother lightly on the cheek. "Don't speak to any strange men!"

"What are you and Peter planning to do, exactly?" Mrs. Graham wanted to know.

Diane repeated the program she had outlined earlier. "He's picking me up here right after lunch; then we're going sightseeing. Madame Tussaud's Wax Works and maybe the zoo or the Tower of London. I'm not sure."

"Animals look the same everywhere but it'll be your only chance to see the crown jewels," mentioned Mr. Graham in what he hoped was an offhand manner. He had discovered that teen-agers resisted improvement as a matter of principle.

Picking up his briefcase, he glanced at his daughter out of the corner of his eye, but Diane was not reacting.

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She had curled up in a chair and was occupied with an emery board and her fingernails. " 'By now," she murmured casually as her parents went toward the door.

Manicuring her nails and washing out her nylons did not take Diane more than an hour, and the rest of the morning stretched invitingly, especially since the hotel was in the heart of the shopping section, and Diane had already converted her ten dollars accumulated spending money into British currency. She kept remembering a sweater in the window of Harrods', a department store where her mother had gone to order some Wedgewood. It was a creamy white cashmere cardigan with a go-with-anything air, and Diane was sure it would be exceedingly becoming. What better time would there be to try it on than now?

Full of a pleasant sense of independence, Diane dressed and rode downstairs in the crowded elevator, confident that she appeared completely at home in this great hotel and in the city of London. Regent Street stretched like a misty ribbon before her and the shops she passed were filled with entrancing and lovely things. Keeping in mind the directions the doorman had given her, she idled along, looking; and there was much to see. Besides the shops there were the people—the smartly helmeted "bobbies," the neat, mustached businessmen in bowlers such as were seen only at weddings at home. Diane thought they looked very elegant, much more

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crisply turned out than the women, and decided it might be fun to marry an Englishman when she grew up.

The streets were very crowded. Double-decker busses painted fire-engine red made a splash of color against the sober grays of the buildings and among the black Rolls Royces which rolled sedately through the maze of traffic. Most of the cars were monotone in shade, in stern contrast to the gaiety of the American models. Conservative, Diane supposed, was a typically British word. No wonder it occurred so often in Gilbert and Sullivan's tunes.

It took longer than she expected to reach Harrods', and it was necessary to ask a policeman to redirect her when she made a wrong turn. There were no blocks in London, she discovered, only turnings. The streets unwound like snakes, then apparently curled back upon themselves, and it was surprisingly easy to get lost.

But finally she arrived, and the sweater was still in the window, just as she had remembered it. The fact that it bore no price tag made her hesitate a moment, but the knowledge of the money in her wallet gave her courage and she stepped blithely through the door.

It was fun to be shopping alone in the spacious, beautiful store. I'm in London, Diane kept telling herself. I, Diane Graham, am alone and shopping in London. She could scarcely believe that it could seem so strange and yet so natural. Maybe I'm developing self-assurance, she

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thought, the way Daddy said I would when I reached sixteen.

"Can you tell me where the sweater department is?" she asked a clerk behind a counter filled with perfumes.

"I beg your pardon, Miss?"

"The sweaters," Diane repeated, and the girl seemed faintly puzzled, then amused. "If it's pullovers you're looking for you'll find them on the second floor right across from the lift," she told her, and was still smiling as Diane walked away.

The lift, Diane realized, meant the elevator. Already, she was aware that the English spoke of drugstores as chemists and of trucks as lorries. But pullover was a new one to add to her list. She found the proper section now without any trouble and consulted a salesgirl, describing the sweater as such.

"I'll send down for it if you don't mind waiting," the clerk said politely.

"You mean you don't have another one like it?" Accustomed to the large duplicate stock in American department stores, Diane sounded surprised.

"I'm afraid not, but we'll be glad to fetch it for you."

"Well, thank you," Diane agreed with some reluctance. She felt that it was a lot of trouble, in case she should decide not to buy. As she waited she began to wish she had at least asked the price. By the time ten minutes

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passed she was also beginning to wish she had waited for her mother to accompany her.

But when the sweater was finally laid in her hands its texture was so kitten-soft and luxurious that her eyes began to sparkle once more.

"It's beautiful," she breathed.

"Would you care to try it on?" the clerk suggested. "I think it's just your size."

She was right. The fit was perfect. "I love it," Diane admitted, and finally dared to ask the price.

The young woman consulted a tag that bore numerals which might as well have been hieroglyphics, so little did they mean to Diane. "Five pounds two and six," she announced brightly. "You're American, aren't you? It's really much less than what you'd have to pay in New York."

Diane felt both anxious and confused. She wanted the sweater desperately, but she wasn't quite certain that she had sufficient money and she didn't want to take out her British currency and paw through it on the counter like a greenhorn. "I get sort of mixed up with the exchange," she finally admitted. "I'm not sure if I have enough."

The clerk was sympathetic. She didn't seem in the least supercilious as she helped her young customer count out the price. She didn't seem aware, either, that the coins left in Diane's purse were appallingly few. Diane

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inspected them with a frown while the cardigan was being wrapped.

Already she was beginning to feel hungry, but there didn't seem to be much change left for lunch. Oh well, she thought, I can live without eating—this noon, anyway—and I'll make Peter buy me a filling tea.

But by the time she had walked half-way back to the hotel her stomach was beginning to grumble alarmingly and she reversed her judgment. After all, what will I need money for from now on, she asked herself? I may as well spend my last few shillings on something sustaining. Peter will stake me to bus fare if we have far to go. So with care Diane chose a restaurant which had a posted menu outside and ordered a corned beef sandwich and a glass of milk.

The tip, added to the check, took all but a few coppers remaining in her wallet, but she felt warmed and cheerful after eating, conscious that time was slipping away and that Peter would be arriving for her in half an hour. Happily clutching the bag containing the sweater under her arm, she hurried on back to the hotel.

Along with her room key, the desk clerk handed her an envelope. "Phone message for you, Miss Graham," she murmured. "Came in about an hour ago."

Diane tore open the envelope curiously. Then her heart fell. The message was brief but explicit. *Please meet me at Madame Tussaud's instead of hotel at one*

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thirty. Will explain change of plan when I see you. Peter.

She glanced at her watch. It was already twenty minutes past one, and she hadn't the slightest idea how to get to Madame Tussaud's except in a taxi. The red busses, which had seemed so friendly and jolly this morning, changed complexion on closer consideration. The one in which she rode might hurtle off heaven-knows-where. Diane felt that she might as well be taking a trip to the moon.

The clerk noticed her expression of consternation. "Can I help you, Miss?" she asked.

"Yes," Diane said with more decision than she felt. "You can keep this package for me, please, along with the room key. I'm terribly late for an appointment. And will you tell me how to get to Madame Tussaud's?"

The clerk pursed her lips. "It's quite a way from here, Miss," she said thoughtfully. "If you're a stranger I would suggest you take a taxi."

Diane swallowed hard. She couldn't confess that she had no money for a taxi, and now that she had admitted she was late she couldn't press the question of one of those menacing busses. "Thank you," she murmured with a wan smile. "I guess that's a good idea."

Hurrying back across the lobby, she tried to decide what to do. Of course, it was possible to skip the whole thing, return to her room and hope that Peter would get

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tired of waiting and phone again; but this was unthinkable except as a last resort.

The doorman's comfortable bulk loomed before her, just outside the plate glass doors. Diane approached him tentatively. "If I wanted to take a bus to Madame Tussaud's, where would I get it?" she asked.

"Let me see, young lady, it's rather complicated. First you'd get a 72 to the Marble Arch, then you'd change to—" The doorman hesitated. "Wait a minute. I'd better look it up in my book."

But Diane stopped him. "Never mind. I'll ask when I get that far," she said, and thanked him. "Where do I get the 72?"

The man told her and she hurried around the corner, quite aware that when she had paid the fare on this first bus she would have to walk. She waited in a queue by a signpost, but it seemed to her that every number except the right one passed by in the next ten minutes. Already the hands of her watch stood at one thirty-five.

By the time she had finally boarded No. 72 and it had turned out of Park Lane into Oxford Street and edged along through the crowded West End, another twenty minutes had passed. Diane was beginning to feel a trifle frantic. Suppose Peter didn't wait? But he *would* wait. He *must*! Otherwise she was faced with the prospect of a walk of miles back to the hotel.

When she had ridden to the limit of the fare zone, she

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approached the nearest constable, a handsome fellow whose only flaw was a double chin accentuated by the strap of his helmet, and breathlessly asked the quickest way to her destination. Now every moment was precious, and British thoroughness seemed consequently maddening.

The bobby insisted on drawing a diagram which Diane doubted that she could follow. "You go left here to the third turning on the right, then follow along until you reach a square with a small chapel facing you, go round the chapel to the left, turn first right, and that should bring you out on—let me see—"

But Diane murmured a hasty thanks, assured the bobby that if she ever got far she'd ask again, and started on her first left at a sprint which would have done credit to the Cranford varsity hockey team. She made the third turning still running but slightly out of breath, steadied her gait to a comfortable jog-trot and, through some circumstance that she never could figure out, missed the square with the chapel entirely and ended up on a broad thoroughfare which was apparently even farther away from Madame Tussaud's than the point at which she had disembarked from the bus.

Having asked directions again, she reduced her pace to a walk and tried to keep her wits about her. An hour late! Would Peter still be pacing up and down anxiously, or would he have given up?

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"Turnings," she muttered to herself. "It's these darned turnings. If they only had sensible things like city blocks."

Instead of seeming easy and normal, as it had when discussed from the security of the hotel room in the morning, London loomed to Diane as an irritating puzzle, full of anachronisms. Traffic came wheeling toward her on the left, so that even crossing a street became a hazard. Madame Tussaud's Waxworks might as well have been in Timbuctoo as in this crazy city. Hot and disheveled, she began to wish it were. The Tower of London sounded a good deal easier to unearth. She had heard you could even get to it by boat from Westminster Bridge. Considering the way her feet were hurting, Diane would have traded places, at this point, with the more education-minded among her fellow tourists. She could even have wished that Peter were more interested in culture than in fun.

Mopping her face with a handkerchief already damp and rumpled, Diane was afraid that in another two minutes she'd burst into tears of frustration. Then, just ahead of her, the street she was following opened out into another broad boulevard and, incredibly, less than a hundred yards to the right, stood a squarish, sturdy building on the side wall of which was painted, in great black letters, the alluring legend, "Madame Tussaud's."

Diane galloped the last few paces. Gone was her panic,

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gone her exhaustion. Peter and the end of her journey were near.

She entered a dim, cool lobby, from which rose an impressive pair of marble stairs which split on a landing guarded by a bobby who could have been the brother of any of the constables that she had consulted on her recent race. Two small girls were fidgeting on the first step while their mother bought a guidebook, and a group of three teen-age schoolboys in blazers were standing under a sign pointing enticingly to the Chamber of Horrors, but Peter was not in sight.

Diane's heart, given to the bends today, now dropped to the soles of her burning feet. She took a cursory look at the empty benches under the stairs, then approached one of the two clerks at the desk.

"Could you please tell me if a tall boy with yellow hair has been waiting here for the last hour?" she asked.

The woman's expression remained helpful and interested, but she did not answer.

"Could you please tell me—"

The whoops of the three schoolboys cut in upon the repeated question and Diane glanced their way, then turned scarlet. They were laughing at her!

At the same instant she knew why. The clerk to whom she had been addressing herself was made of wax. Only the other woman at the desk was real.

With as much dignity as she could command, she

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abandoned the whole project and decided there was a fair possibility that Peter might be waiting on the second floor. The guffaws of her tormentors followed her as she marched up the stairs. As she reached the landing a swarm of descending small fry forced her to step aside and she bumped rather directly into the guard.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she murmured automatically, then stiffened into awareness. The constable was made of wax too!

If, at that particular moment, Peter Crowell's familiar heather tweed jacket had not become visible at the top of the steps, Diane suspected that she might have gone raving mad. Rescued, she grinned sheepishly. "I've been talking to all the dummies—like a dummy. I'm awfully sorry to be so late, but I didn't get your message in time." "Girls are always late," Peter said with a shrug. "And as for talking to the dummies, people always do. It's half the fun."

Diane didn't reply. She felt vaguely irritated that he should sound so offhand about her paramount problems. "I kept getting lost," she complained. "London is the most difficult town!"

"Difficult?" Peter repeated as though he couldn't believe his ears. "How can you say that? Actually, London is quite simple, when you get to know it. Wait till you try and find your way around Paris by yourself."

"Maybe I won't try," said Diane faintly.

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"Maybe you won't have to," suggested Peter. "As a matter of fact, I'll be visiting my grandmother about the same time you're over there."

"Remind me," said Diane, "to put by a little taxi fare."

"Why?" asked Peter.

"In case I have to meet you anywhere," Diane said.

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"I'm not sure, really. Picasso is a very complicated painter."

"I'll say." Diane yawned and sank down on a bench in the center of the gallery. "I could use a coke." She consulted her wrist watch. "Anyway, I've got to get back to the hotel pretty soon. Peter's coming for me at four."

Peter and Paris were pleasantly alliterative and, in the past week, had become synonymous in Diane's mind. She considered meeting such an attractive boy on the boat a stroke of fate. It was with him she had done most of the "fun" things—like riding the crowded elevator to the top of the Eiffel Tower, searching for antique firearms in the Flea Market, climbing the crooked streets which led to the butte of Montmartre and seeing the glittering city spread out like a magic carpet far below.

This was the Paris she would always remember—the Paris she and Peter had discovered together—not the Paris of museums and monuments. It was with Peter that she dared to try out her high school French, with Peter that she rode busses and explored the underground and bought peanuts to feed to the pigeons in the Tuileries.

Her mother cut in on Diane's reflections. "What do you like best in this room?" she asked constructively.

Diane grinned. "The window." She could see the gardens below, cool and green, and hear a fountain playing. It was no afternoon to be cooped up indoors.

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Mrs. Graham glanced outside, and this was her undoing. "All right," she said, closing her catalogue. "I give up. They say it's easier for children than for adults to understand Picasso, but as for teen-agers—!" She gave an eloquent shrug.

Diane linked an arm through her mother's as they emerged into the sunshine. "I love to go shopping with you, mother, but you should take Daddy gallery-trotting, really, instead of me."

"Ha!" commented Mrs. Graham descriptively.

"Where is Daddy, by the way?"

"Seeing about a car. After all, he *is* here on business and we should be getting on to Geneva."

Diane didn't like to think about leaving Paris. She walked beside her mother silently, her eyes soft. Long-legged children were sailing boats in the fountains. Little cars were scurrying along the boulevards like beetles and the smiling shopkeepers in their doorways, as usual, were unfailingly polite. "*Merci, Madame. Au 'voir, Madame!*" The lilt at the end of each phrase was so bright and cheery. She would miss them—she would miss it all! But she didn't say so because her feeling about the city was too new and overwhelming to put into words.

"Tired?" Mrs. Graham asked.

"No. Just thinking." Diane began to walk a little

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faster and her mother smiled to herself. It was almost four o'clock.

At the hotel desk Gordon Graham was just picking up the key as his wife and daughter entered. They rode up on the lift together, but Diane hurried into her own room which adjoined her parents'. She would barely have time to change her dress and freshen up.

"What's the rush?" she could hear her father ask, behind her.

"She's going somewhere with Peter Crowell."

"Where?" Mr. Graham came to the connecting door and peered at Diane's reflection in the mirror, looking fatherly.

"To his grandmother's, for tea," Diane told him.

"That sounds safe enough," Gordon Graham chuckled and retreated to a lounge chair in his own room. "How was the Picasso exhibition?" he inquired of his wife.

"It was a mistake," Diane could hear her mother say in an undertone as she kicked off her slippers.

"As bad as Versailles?" Mr. Graham asked, recalling their one expedition as a family.

"What happened at Versailles? I've forgotten."

"Don't you remember when she pointed to that big oil portrait and said, 'Look at Charles Laughton!'"

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"Oh, yes." Mrs. Graham chuckled a bit wearily. "When it was Louis Philippe."

Parents, thought Diane to herself as she brushed her hair, have no sense of humor where their own children are concerned. She was aware that she was disappointing her mother, who expected her to "Ooh" and "Ah" about the Madeleine and the Arc de Triomphe and the book-stalls along the Seine. Diane didn't mean to sound offhand about these attractions, but frequently grown-up enthusiasm made her feel self-conscious and tongue-tied. She wished they wouldn't *expect* so much.

But they did. And she knew it. Snatches of conversation kept drifting through the door. "I wonder if she's getting *anything* out of being here—anything at all?" This was her mother, *sotto voce*.

"Instead of not being able to see the woods for the trees, this seems to be a case of not seeing the Bois for the boy," her father quipped as the telephone rang in Diane's room.

"Hi, there. I'll be right down!" This put a period to the conversation, but it didn't end Diane's reluctant but growing concern. As she cut across the hotel courtyard with Peter, who looked exceptionally tall and slender today in a light sports jacket, she seemed so self-absorbed that he asked, "What's wrong?"

"My family," Diane replied frankly. "Unless I turn

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into a culture vulture they'll never believe bringing me abroad has been worthwhile."

"Come, now," murmured Peter in a conciliatory tone.

"It's true. They think—" Then she broke off abruptly. She couldn't tell Peter they thought she was boy-crazy.

"They think what?"

"Well, they seem to think I'm wasting my time and not *seeing* Paris," Diane replied. "And—and I can't seem to talk to them any more. They make jokes that aren't funny and—oh, grown-ups are so *difficult!*"

Peter didn't laugh. He looked at Diane understandingly with his calm brown eyes and said, "Everybody gets to the stage where they're unable to talk to their parents. I expect it's part of growing up." Then he changed the subject abruptly as he turned Diane into a small street opening off the Rue de Rivoli. "I hope you like my grandmother," he said. "She's different, sort of."

Just how different, Diane learned very shortly when they stepped from the self-service elevator into the top floor apartment of a small residential hotel. With the familiarity of a grandchild and house guest, Peter pushed open the door leading to a large salon cluttered with fragile French furniture. At the long windows looking out on a courtyard, a workman was measuring the aperture left by a missing pane of glass, while at the telephone, beside a small table in the middle distance, stood a bird-like, diminutive woman with a halo of fluffy white hair

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surmounted by a flowered toque. Across her shoulders was flung a scarlet flannel bathrobe, oddly out of keeping with her sleek gray town suit. The minute she saw Peter she sneezed.

"I'm catching cold," she explained, waving a hand toward the broken window accusingly. "This place has been like a barn all day. Come in, come in!" she called to Diane with a welcoming smile. "I'm just ordering tea." Returning her attention to the telephone she commanded, "Tea for three, please, with *beaucoup de* pastry. Oh, and waiter—*très chaud!*"

Diane smiled, but Peter's grandmother seemed to take her strange combination of French and English as a completely plausible manner of speech. She hurried over to her guest and shook both her hands at once, saying happily, "You *are* pretty. It must be wonderful to be young in Paris. Tell me, do you just adore it? I hope you're not lukewarm."

"I'm not," Diane assured her. "I love it." She felt like laughing out loud.

"Sit down and tell me all about it. Where has Peter been taking you?"

Without any of the sense of the constraint she felt with her own parents, Diane told her, and Mrs. Crowell sat on the edge of a gilt and white chair and listened with sparkling eyes. "Wonderful!" she'd say. Or, "Tomorrow

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you must do this! Oh, how marvelous to see it all for the first time!"

When the tea arrived there was scarcely a break in the conversation. If the workman at the window scraped or hammered they all raised their voices to drown the racket out. Once Mrs. Crowell glanced toward the fellow to smile encouragingly, then explained to Diane, "He was supposed to arrive at eight thirty this morning, but he didn't get here until almost noon. Then, of course, it was lunchtime, so he didn't get back until two. When he finally measured the glass he had it wrong, so it didn't fit and had to be re-cut. But you can't hurry the French, you know. Not at all. Patience is something you learn to cultivate."

"Have you lived in Paris long?" Diane wanted to know.

"Ages, my dear. Almost a year. But I'm completely unreconstructed. I can only speak a *soupeçon* of French.

"You're dreadful, Grandmother," Peter agreed with a twinkle in his eye. "Diane does better than you."

"I shouldn't doubt it. But then you're still in school, aren't you dear? So convenient, really."

Mrs. Crowell's manner of speech had a nonsense quality that tickled Diane's sense of humor, yet behind the surface frivolity she could sense the little lady's true appreciation of Paris, which she called a "woman's city."

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With consummate tact she drew her young guest out, listening to her youthful impressions with approval.

"You've learned a great deal about Paris in a very few days," she said. "I congratulate you."

"I wish you'd tell my mother that!" Diane blurted out.

"But I shall, my dear. I've been meaning to phone her anyway." Mrs. Crowell clasped her hands, planning happily. "Suppose I ask her to lunch with me tomorrow!"

At that moment the man at the window gave a last, sweeping stroke with his putty knife and stepped back to admire his handiwork. "*Fini?*" inquired Peter's grandmother, getting to her feet and applauding vigorously to show her appreciation.

The Frenchman beamed. "*Voilà!*" he cried, throwing out his arms in a magnificent operatic gesture. There was an icy tinkle, followed by an ominous crash. The hand holding the putty knife was drawn back too late. Another pane of glass lay shattered in the areaway below.

Walking back to the hotel in the lingering twilight, Diane told Peter, "I had such fun at your grandmother's. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

"Better than Picasso?"

"Much better."

"Yet," said Peter shrewdly, "Picasso is part of Paris too."

"So many things are part of Paris," murmured Diane,

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smiling at an ancient flower vendor who held forth a bunch of sweetheart roses from among her fragrant wares.

Peter stopped and bought them for her while Diane stood by, feeling excitingly grownup and desirable. She pinned them on the shoulder of her new white cashmere cardigan, and Peter told her she looked very *parisienne*.

Then they continued back to the hotel—the long way, along the Seine. Lights began to twinkle on the Left Bank, and music drifted up from the river boats. A man passed with a collie on a leash, and for a brief moment Diane felt a pang of homesickness. But Jim, Honey, indeed all of Cranford, seemed very far away. Peter caught her hand and asked, "What'll we do tomorrow? It will be your last day."

They made plans to go to the Sainte-Chapelle—Mrs. Crowell's suggestion—in the morning, and to a new French movie in the afternoon. Then Peter left her in the lobby, and Diane went upstairs to find her mother dressed to go out for dinner, just pulling on her gloves. Her father was sitting on the edge of the bed with the telephone in his hand, and by his tone of voice Diane knew he was feeling frustrated.

"Look, give me somebody who speaks English," he was saying. "English!"

"There's some confusion," Mrs. Graham whispered in explanation, "about the delivery of the car."

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Diane tiptoed over to the bed. "Try '*Est-ce qu'on parle anglais?*' " she suggested. "Sometimes that works."

The car was a complete surprise.

It was parked in the courtyard when Peter and Diane arrived back at the hotel the next afternoon, a cream-colored convertible with red upholstery and a black top, smaller than an American car but trim and sporty. Mr. Graham was hovering over it pleasurably, trying out keys and consulting the manual of instructions for tire pressures and driving advice.

"Why, it looks brand new!" Diane cried, hurrying across the cobblestones with Peter behind her.

"It is," her father admitted sheepishly. "I bought it."

"What!"

"It just seemed simpler," he muttered, with a side glance at Peter. "It'll probably be cheaper in the long run."

Peter nodded, with a man-to-man look of comprehension, though the logic of this remark escaped Diane. "You will let me drive it, won't you, Daddy?"

"In Paris, no."

"In the country then?"

Mr. Graham looked doubtful, but unwilling to issue an ultimatum. Instead, he patted the little car proudly and asked "Like it?"

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Diane said, "You bet," and Peter added, "I think it's jolly."

"Come look inside the hood," Diane's father invited. "It's really engineered."

He was still singing the car's praises at dinner time. Diane had to fight for an opportunity to inquire of her mother, "Did you have a good time with Mrs. Crowell?"

"Delightful. We lunched at the Ritz," she said with the air of a woman who has done the ultimate. Then her expression changed, and became both curious and guarded. "Where were you and Peter today?"

Diane hesitated. Into her mind's eye flashed the soaring stained glass windows of the Sainte-Chapelle, magnificently wrought to the greater glory of God. She felt again the thrill of raising her eyes to the high, vaulted ceiling of the little chapel, heard Peter's voice explaining how the jewel-like glass had been removed and stored away against destruction during the war.

But somehow, in the midst of car talk and the clatter of silver and china, she couldn't speak of the Sainte-Chapelle. "Oh, around," she said noncommittally. Then, knowing that more was expected of her, she added, "This afternoon we went to the movies."

Mr. Graham grunted. "The movies! You can go to the movies at home."

But Mrs. Graham patted her husband's arm and smiled with new wisdom. "I understand from Mrs. Crowell,"

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she told him, "that Diane and Peter have actually been seeing quite a bit of Paris."

Then, as Diane turned to listen to the waiter who wanted to point out the specialties on the menu, she added to her husband, "Sometimes I think it's difficult for parents and children to communicate."

Diane glanced up, but held her peace until her mother smiled across the table and said, "I told Mrs. Crowell that we'd leave a forwarding address. Who knows, later on Peter might decide to take a little trip."

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DIANE LAY FLAT ON HER STOMACH ON THE DOCK OF THE Pension du Lac turning her charm bracelet on her wrist. Besides the two heart lockets which had been Jim's and Toby's parting gifts, there was Aunt Hope's significant little gold ship and a miniature Eiffel Tower which Peter Crowell had bought for her that last afternoon in Paris.

In Switzerland, Paris seemed very far away. No boys were in the offing, at least not in Diane's offing. Although two likely lads were water-skiing behind a fast speed boat in the distance, they might as well have been in limbo for all the notice they took of the American girl on the dock.

Diane sighed. Geneva was all right and the lake—though cold for swimming—was really magnificent. Only at this point there was nothing to do. You couldn't look at scenery forever, and she had visited the required

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monuments. She had even had enough of shopping, having helped her mother buy a wrist watch and selected a miniature music box attached to a car key chain for Jim. Since he was keeping her collie, she thought he deserved a remembrance, but she wasn't sure about Toby. What was the etiquette in the matter, she wondered. Did girls take presents home to boys?

Occupied by such a consuming question, she didn't hear her mother approach. "Diane!" Mrs. Graham called. "Go for a dip if you like, but then come on and get dressed. We've got the car for the rest of the day! Daddy is going to be tied up in meetings until after dinner."

Diane turned over and sat up. "We?" she asked, and the pronoun was filled with meaning.

Her mother ignored the implication. "I thought we'd drive to Lake Annecy. It's somewhere across the border," she hurried on, waving her hand vaguely at the mountains on the other side of the lake, "and it's supposed to be really worth seeing. The guidebooks call it the Venice of France."

Diane yawned. "Are you trying to put me off, Mommy? You know very well that what I'm really interested in is am I allowed to drive?"

Mrs. Graham avoided the directness of her daughter's eyes. "Well, Daddy thinks not today. He's not even too sure about me, you know, with four speeds and the Geneva traffic and all."

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"In Paris it was the Paris traffic. In Geneva it's the Geneva traffic, and in Rome I won't be allowed to do as the Romans do," Diane said glumly. "What's the use of being sixteen?"

"Sixteen," said Diane's mother reminiscently, "is a lovely age."

"It could be a lovely age," Diane admitted. "I looked forward to it all last year."

It was such an unexpected remark that Mrs. Graham asked, "Why?"

"Because when you're fifteen and can't drive, everybody knows you're fifteen, but when you're sixteen and can drive you could be any age." Diane bit her lip and added bitterly, "Except that if you're sixteen and aren't allowed to drive you might as well be fifteen—or dead."

"Oh, now, darling, don't be overdramatic."

"I'm not. I'm just furious at Daddy, that's all!"

"Most girls," said Mrs. Graham with the superior air that all adults assume when they want to sidetrack an argument, "would consider themselves extremely lucky to be in your shoes."

Diane was not the type to sulk. Moreover, she recognized the essential justice of her mother's remark. By the time she was seated in the little convertible, with a light coat flung around her shoulders and *Europa Touring*, a book of road maps which was the motorists' bible, on

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her lap, she looked as eager and good-tempered as usual. She even offered the comment that driving with the top down would be fun.

Marcia Graham was a good companion. This Diane had discovered for the first time in Switzerland, because in London and in Paris they had never been alone. The girl and the woman were approaching one another more closely than ever before in their interests. Diane liked to shop and except when art museums were involved, to sightsee. She was also discovering that she and her mother could laugh together over the same things.

For instance, the car. To one another they could admit that they preferred automatic gear shifting and power steering, but Gordon Graham treated the little convertible like a favorite child, in whom he could see no flaw. Even though he occasionally ground the gears, he professed to admire them and held his temper when—as happened all too often—he found it all but impossible to get into reverse.

Mr. Graham lovingly called the car the Minx, which happened to be its name, but in private Mrs. Graham and Diane called it the Donkey, and sometimes the Mule. Today the Mule reacted like a lamb. It was neither cold enough to stall, nor harried enough to scream, nor did it balk as it sometimes did when it needed water. Mrs. Graham drove blithely down the Quai du Mont Blanc, more cautiously across the bridge which spanned

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the Rhone River where it emptied into the lake, and then immediately proceeded to get lost in a maze of inconsiderate one-way streets.

After rounding the Cathedral of St. Pierre three times, Diane managed to get them onto the Avenue Henri-Dunant which, logically, should have led them to the Annecy road. But without warning it crossed a river, changed its name in midstream to the Boulevard Pont d'Arve, and then two road signs, pointing in two diagonal directions, both said "Annecy."

"Eenie-meeny-miney-moe," counted Diane. "Let's take one to the right."

"Splendid! There's less traffic going that way." Mrs. Graham as yet felt no self-confidence whatever in handling the Mule and whenever a truck loomed on her horizon she positively shuddered. "Because," she explained to Diane, "I feel so small."

Diane didn't feel small. She felt capable, but she didn't say so. She refused, on this beautiful afternoon, to seem aggrieved.

The road, once they left the city behind, was a narrow ribbon of macadam winding through gentle hills. The sun was warm without being hot, the breeze was polite, and the little farms were soft in color and drowsy in atmosphere. The Grahams presented their *carnet de passage* at the border and Switzerland changed to France almost imperceptibly.

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Annecy itself was a study in contrasts. At first glance it was a holiday town, with hotels and shops swinging around the edge of a deep blue lake. But there was another face to the resort, to be discovered by the curious. Mrs. Graham and Diane parked the car and wandered back along a canal to the old city, where only foot-bridges crossed the water, and where ancient houses and shops and markets huddled together in weathered intimacy. It was charming. It was quaint. Moreover, as Diane commented, it was completely out of this world.

They loitered, watching children playing in the shallow streams, standing by as an old man rigged his fishing line, discovering—as though no one had ever seen such a thing before—two sisters weaving straw baskets before their dim, cluttered, one-room store. They watched French women scurrying from market to market, long loaves of fresh bread, sweet-smelling and crusty, carried unwrapped under their arms. Diane felt lazy and a little sleepy, but quite content to follow her mother's lead. It was an afternoon to remember, a truly pleasant time.

Mrs. Graham used up an entire roll of film on snapshots and twice she commented, "This is like something out of a book."

Diane agreed, but she was aware, quite suddenly, that a change had taken place in the sky. Storm clouds were gathering, and the sun was obscured by a saffron pall. "I

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think," she said without special alarm, "that it's going to rain."

Her mother looked upward. "Wow!" she commented inelegantly. "We'd better start back."

It was only then that they realized how far afield they had wandered. It took them more than half an hour to find their way through the labyrinth of narrow, cobblestoned streets and bridges to the lakeside avenue where the Minx was parked. By then the first great drops of rain were falling, and the sky was no longer yellow. It was an ominous purple-black.

The storm broke over their heads without further warning, pounding on the top of the convertible, forcing them to close every window, creating within the little car a steam bath atmosphere.

"There's no use trying to fight this," said Diane sensibly. "We'd better sit it out."

But after fifteen minutes Marcia began to fidget. "I don't want Gordon to worry," she murmured. "And I had planned to get to Geneva before dark."

"It's dark now," mentioned Diane.

"But it's a false darkness," replied Mrs. Graham as though she were trying to encourage herself. "It really isn't late at all."

"We might have dinner here," Diane suggested, "and by then the storm should be over. We could drive back in the twilight—if there is one."

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"And if there isn't?"

"Well, then, we'd have to drive back in the dark."

"Oh dear," sighed Mrs. Graham timidly. "Maybe we shouldn't have come at all."

Diane turned and looked at her mother in unconcealed surprise. "Nonsense," she said firmly. "We've had a perfectly beautiful afternoon! What's the matter, Mommy? Losing your nerve?"

"Nothing of the sort," Mrs. Graham snapped. "But in a strange country and a strange car—"

Diane spread her arms in an inclusive gesture. "France," she said dreamily. "There's nothing strange about France—"

The macadam curled before the headlights like shiny snakeskin an hour later when Diane and her mother finally decided it was safe to head for home. Rain was still falling steadily, but it was no longer pelting down out of the skies, and several pieces of Kleenex had been sacrificed to clean the windshield so that the pair could peer out into the murky summer night.

"I'd be glad to drive," Diane offered once, but her mother simply snorted.

"That would be all we'd need."

Following this rebuff Diane subsided into silence. If people would just stop treating her like a two-year-old! As Mrs. Graham leaned forward tensely, a frown be-

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tween her pretty eyebrows, Diane wondered whether grown-ups ever treated their children like equals, even when they were married. Frankly, she doubted it.

Of course, in the back of her mind, she knew her mother was irritable because of the storm. She knew also that it was important for members of a family to make allowances for one another's changes in mood. Still, she did feel that she could handle the car with complete competence. And she was perfectly certain that she could see better than her mother in the dark!

If only she had a chance to prove it—but as she leaned back against the red leather seat Diane decided that this was like wishing for the moon. She might dream of emergencies—even serious accidents—in which she alone would be capable of taking over the wheel, but there was a hopeless improbability about these situations. In reality it seemed obvious that all through Europe her parents would keep on putting her off.

They were well out in the country now, and Mrs. Graham began to relax. She settled back and pressed on the accelerator with more confidence, increasing their speed to forty miles an hour, which she considered a maximum for safety in the rain.

"Mother," asked Diane idly, "when you were young did you want things desperately?"

"What things?"

"Oh, anything."

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"I suppose so. I can't remember."

Diane sighed. "When I'm old I bet I'll remember," she said.

Mrs. Graham appeared to chuckle to herself. "You think anyone over thirty is old, don't you?"

"Well, I wouldn't call them young."

"I guess it's all relative."

"What do you mean by 'relative'?"

"Well, right now I think sixty is pretty old, but when I'm fifty I suppose my point of view will have changed."

Diane considered this comment without much interest. "You know," she said after a few minutes, "I can't imagine you or Daddy being really young. Like me, I mean."

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Graham, "the things you say are positively shattering."

"They are? Why?"

"Because I happen to feel fairly young right now. How old do you think I am, anyway? I'll bet you don't even know."

Diane shrugged. "Fortyish."

"I am precisely thirty-seven years old," Mrs. Graham said tartly, "and I'll thank you to remember that thirty-seven is not forty. Not by a long shot!"

"I could be wrong," Diane said mildly, "but I think we've missed a turn somewhere. This isn't our road."

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"How do you know?" Her mother's voice was still filled with exasperation.

"It just doesn't look like it."

"Nonsense." Mrs. Graham peered out into the shiny blackness. "Everything looks different at night." As though a spurt of speed would settle the matter, she pressed down firmly on the accelerator and the little car shot ahead, passing through a village which looked deserted in the rain. Lights gleamed dimly, a horizontal blur on either side of the road, but there was not a sign of a human being, although somewhere behind them a whistle began to blow.

"Cheezit, the cops," Diane murmured with a yawn. "You'd better slow down, Mommy. There's a crossroad coming up."

Mrs. Graham obediently put on her brake and then bit her lip. "You may be right about the route," she offered, rolling down the car window and slowing to a halt. "Do you see anybody we can ask? I don't remember this."

Diane peered out on her side, but there wasn't a soul anywhere near the intersection, although a traffic light blinked a warning and a trailer truck came rumbling along on the opposite tack. "Better turn around and go back," she suggested. "Maybe we can find the guy who's blowing that whistle back there."

With surprising docility, Mrs. Graham swung the

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Minx around. Then she sped back quickly toward the village they had just passed. "I'm getting nervous. I want to get home," she confessed.

Suddenly, directly ahead of them, appeared a bevy of men in uniform, who scattered as Mrs. Graham hurtled past.

"Ask them where we're headed," she advised Diane, skidding to a stop. "They look like soldiers or something. Wait. I'll back up."

But this was unnecessary. Before she could find reverse another group of men with capes flying out like bat wings approached the car at a dead run and Diane and her mother found themselves surrounded with gesticulating, shouting Frenchmen.

Diane leaned out of the window and trained her most winning smile upon a moustache under a visored cap. "*Excusez-moi*," she cried in a voice pitched to quell this controversy, whatever it was. "*Quelle est la direction pour Genève?*"

Instantly pandemonium broke loose. The second group of men were joined by the first and instead of answering Diane's question they formed a human blockade around the Minx and raised the most extraordinary hullabaloo, yelling at one another and at the two women, shaking their forefingers and leaning into the car.

Diane put her hands over her ears and screamed into

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the din. "Talk slowly! I can't understand a thing you're trying to say! *Nous sommes Américaines.*"

This brought an immediate reaction. The batmen turned to the late arrivals and broke into even more rapid French, meanwhile using their busy forefingers to describe rapid circles at their temples.

"If you think we're crazy I think you're fresh out of a belfry yourself," muttered Diane for her mother's benefit.

But Mrs. Graham was positively cowering behind the wheel. "I think we may have done something wrong," she murmured. "But I wonder what? Was I speeding or something, do you suppose?"

"There aren't any speed laws here," Diane said with certainty. "At least none anybody pays any attention to. Maybe they're just trying to be helpful, but they're certainly not making any sense."

At that moment the moustached official with the visored cap jerked open the door on the driver's side and indicated that Mrs. Graham was to descend.

"Goodness," she murmured, consulting Diane. "Do you think I should?"

"I'll come with you," Diane said bravely, and opened her own door with a peremptory shove.

"I don't like this," Mrs. Graham admitted in a voice which all but trembled. "I don't like this a bit." She pulled her door shut suddenly. "Diane, don't you dare get out!"

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This precipitated a new tirade. Arms waved, foreheads were tapped distractedly, voices broke into screeches of wrath. Through the din Diane caught a familiar phrase, and a smile broke over her face.

"*Carnet de passage!* They want our *carnet*, Mother. This must be the border or something, I guess."

Mrs. Graham groped for the necessary documents, and the first batman bore off the car papers and their passports in righteous wrath. "I can't understand what all the fuss is about," she complained with a sigh. "Why didn't they say so in the first place?" Then her voice dropped to a whisper. "I wish these other fellows would go off now. The fun's over. Why do they keep on hanging around?"

Diane didn't know. She tried saying "*Au revoir, Messieurs,*" politely, but it produced no result. They continued to stand around muttering among themselves until the gendarme returned with the stamped papers.

Then they formed a flying wedge and arranged themselves in front of the car, indicating that Mrs. Graham was to drive slowly in their wake. Diane sat puzzled for a few minutes, but as they drew up before another lighted building she started to giggle.

"Do you know what you did, Mommy?" she asked, then delivered her own answer. "You went through both the French and Swiss border-blocks without stopping. That's what all the furor is about."

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Diane, with just a faint suggestion of a smile, snapped on the directional signal to indicate that she was pulling over to the right and competently steered the Mule into the drive of the Pension du Lac.

Her mother, buried in thought, sat hunched in the seat beside her. "Diane—" she said, as the driver pulled the car to a stop.

"Yes, Mother?"

"I think," said Mrs. Graham, "that it might be—well, perhaps wise not to mention the incident at the border to your father. You know how excited men get about these things."

"I know," said Diane sweetly.

"And you agree with me?"

"Completely."

Mrs. Graham heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank you," she said.

Like conspirators, they smiled at one another and rolled up the windows of the Minx. Diane investigated the sky as they crunched across the gravel drive toward the front door. "It's clearing off," she mentioned.

"Belatedly," said Mrs. Graham.

They found their man sipping after dinner coffee on the terrace overlooking the black satin lake. "Hi," he greeted them. "Have a good time?"

"Lovely," they chorused. "Perfectly lovely!"

"Good!" Gordon Graham got up and kissed his wife

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on the cheek affectionately. "I was just beginning to worry about you. No mishaps?"

"None," they said in unison.

Then Diane's eyes began to twinkle impishly. "Shall we tell him?" she asked her mother.

Mrs. Graham paled. "Tell him what?"

"Tell him that you let me drive home?"

"At night?" Diane's father sounded shocked.

For one flashing, indignant instant Mrs. Graham's eyes met her daughter's, then she lowered her lashes discreetly and made the best of a bad situation. "Yes," she said sportingly. "And she handled the car very well, Gordon. I feel quite as safe with her as I do with you."

Roman Fireworks

DIANE, AS THE EXPRESSION GOES, WAS FEELING HER OATS.

Since she had been allowed to drive the car, life had taken a turn for the better, and she was beginning to fancy herself a seasoned traveler, very *soignée*.

To begin with, as she had suspected from the beginning, there was something about a girl with almost-blond hair behind the wheel of a convertible that made many a lad turn his head and take a second look. This pleased her. It pleased her even more when two or three of these interested young men wangled introductions, and the last four days of her week in Geneva turned out to be a complete success.

Of course she was devastated when her father decided that they must pull up stakes and move on to Rome. But she had been devastated before, and she had learned a very interesting phrase—"survival of the fittest." In

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Diane's philosophy, this was designed to apply especially to attractive girls. She said good-by to her Swiss beaux sadly, but her heart was high.

The charms on her bracelet, by the time she reached Rome, had acquired a delightful tinkle, like water spilling over a dam. Henri had insisted on buying her a small gold cowbell—"to remember me by," he said in his boarding-school English. And Albert (pronounced Albear) had pressed upon her a miniature chalet. "*Un cadeau*," he called it, "*pour une jeune fille très charmante*." The admiration in his voice implied that one day, if she cared to consider a continental marriage, they might set up housekeeping on an Alp of their own.

It was all very delightful and flattering, even though her parents turned out to be a bit stuffy and kept muttering words like "spoiled" and "overconfident" whenever they thought their daughter was out of earshot. Diane even began to suspect that her mother was faintly jealous, especially when Mrs. Graham announced one bright Roman morning that she had an appointment at Elizabeth Arden's, and that she planned to have her hair dyed.

"You're teasing!" Diane was frankly horrified.

"Not in the least. Didn't you notice how chic Signora Carvalho looked last night with her *coup de soleil*?"

Gordon Graham looked baffled. "What's that?"

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"Sun streaks," announced his wife. "I think they're very smart."

"On some people," muttered Diane with a frown.

"Can't you learn," suggested her father in a patronizing tone, "not to take your mother seriously?"

"What are you going to do this morning, dear?" Mrs. Graham asked sweetly, and neither Diane nor her father could tell to whom she was speaking, because she looked at neither, though her face had the innocence of a kitten's—a clever kitten who has just discovered a secret saucer of cream.

Signora Carvallo, who had given Mrs. Graham such strange ideas, was a stunning Italian matron with an equally stunning son who had a singularly appropriate name—Valentine. The Carvallos had been introduced to the Grahams at a dinner party held at a *palazzo* owned by an American family who were business friends of Diane's father. The terraced garden overlooked St. Peter's, the moon was new, and the cypress and Roman pines formed an appropriate background for a very delightful evening during which Val invited Diane to go sightseeing with him the next day.

"I said what are you going to do this morning?" This time Mrs. Graham looked directly at her daughter.

"Oh. I'm going to the catacombs with Val."

Mr. and Mrs. Graham nodded across the breakfast

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table at one another and Diane knew that she was in the clear. The catacombs sounded properly educational.

Diane dressed with special care and practiced her few words of Italian, thanking her lucky stars that Val Carvallo, like most of the other Europeans she had met, spoke adequate English. It didn't occur to her to be slightly ashamed that she, as an American, felt no compunction about her lack of Italian. She accepted it as an incontrovertible fact that Americans were not linguists and that Europeans were.

Nevertheless, it was fun to be able to say "*Grazie, Signor*" and "*Buon giorno*" and "*Buona notte*" and "*Come sta?*" She felt that these phrases lent color to her conversation, and stimulated good-will.

Val, when he met her in the lobby of the hotel, was even more exciting-looking than she remembered. His black velvet eyes were shining, his smile was quick and full of pleasure and the courtesy with which he treated his new American friend made Diane feel like a princess. It was going to be a beautiful day!

They walked out of the hotel and turned toward the Spanish Steps, at the base of which flower vendors sold their colorful wares under bright umbrellas. Tourists with cameras were coming and going in the hot sun, and Diane noticed two other American girls rather peevishly tagging after their mother. She felt lucky by

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comparison, because they turned and looked at Val with envy. He was an escort of whom to be proud.

"I thought we might take a carriage," he was saying now, "and drive first to the Coliseum and then out the Via Appia, which is very historical and which goes right past the catacombs. You would like that?"

"I would love that," Diane replied with a happy smile.

"It is a shame to hide such pretty eyes, but you must put on your sunglasses," Val said protectively. "The light is strong."

Diane did as she was told, pausing at the foot of the steps to unearth them from the depths of her straw purse. Later, she realized that this momentary pause was her undoing.

Half a minute more and Val would have been handing her up into a carriage. Even fifteen seconds more and she would have had the glasses on, creating at least a partial disguise. But instead, captured like a canary helpless in a net of circumstance, Diane looked up from her rummaging, astonished by the sound of her own name being called in an unmistakable voice.

"Holly Harper!" She moaned the words rather than spoke them, and looked into the blue eyes of her cousin Henrietta without being able to credit her own vision. "For Pete's sake, what are you doing here?"

Then she saw her Aunt Hope turning away from the flower seller, two crisp white carnations pinned to the

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collar of her summer suit. "Diane! Darling! I knew we'd run into you sooner or later, even though I couldn't reach your mother to tell her we were coming. What wonderful, wonderful luck!"

Diane swallowed. "Yes, isn't it," she said rather feebly, and, remembering her manners, turned to introduce Valentine.

"My aunt and my cousin," she said, and watched him bow over her Aunt Hope's hand in a manner which was positively courtly, then turn his full and fascinated attention on the beautiful blonde.

That Henrietta was beautiful, particularly in this pale blue dress which showed her tanned shoulders to advantage, even Diane had to admit. Her gleaming golden hair, her delicately rounded figure, but above all the expression of wide-eyed innocence which had become Holly's trademark, made her undeniably worth anyone's attention—man's or boy's. "*Enchanté*, Miss Harper," Val was murmuring a French greeting very correctly, while Holly let her soft hand linger in his.

Aunt Hope, meanwhile, was launched on a sketchy explanation of their presence in Rome. "Our buyer went to the hospital for an emergency operation, so I had this chance to come over for the Italian and French openings. Of course I had to bring Holly along! Now do tell me where you're staying? I'll write it down and phone your mother at once. Won't she be surprised?"

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"You bet," said Diane. "But there's no use calling her until after lunch. She's at Liz Arden's having her hair dyed."

"Dyed?" Mrs. Harper squealed. "Marcia?"

"That's the word."

"Well, good for her!" Diane's aunt said surprisingly. Then she glanced at her wrist watch. "Goodness, I really have to run."

Diane smiled sweetly, because she couldn't think of anything more pleasant than to have Holly run too, and quickly, before she got a strangle hold on Val. Then, of course, the inevitable happened. Henrietta turned to her mother and said in a voice like spun sugar, "You don't mind if I stay with Diane, now that we've found her? I'm really getting frightfully tired of being cooped up in salons looking at stuffy old winter clothes."

Diane would willingly have cooped Holly up in a jail and let her look at stuffy old iron bars. She opened her mouth to explain that she was terribly sorry, but that she and Val were already late for an engagement, when the Italian boy interrupted.

"You must go with us to see the Coliseum and the catacombs!" he cried with a flashing smile.

"Holly doesn't like history, Val. She wouldn't be in the least interested, really."

"That is too bad." Val sounded crestfallen. "It is such a nice morning. We were going to take a carriage."

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Henrietta clasped her hands in excitement and smiled her most devastating smile. "And I do adore carriages! Thank you very much. I'd love to come along. She looked up at Diane shyly from under the brush of her lashes, and murmured, very winningly, "If I may."

Diane bit her lip and tried to keep her assent from sounding as ungracious as she felt. As though it weren't enough to have Holly to contend with in Cranford! Rome, so far as she was concerned, was already growing too small to hold them both.

But the carriage held three very comfortably, with Holly in the middle looking like a cherub in the blue dress that matched her eyes. She told Valentine that she considered Italian men "perfectly handsome," that she "just loved Rome," and that she thought the Appian Way was "so romantic."

"Why?" broke in Diane.

"Oh," said Holly gently, "it just is."

"I bet you don't know a thing about it."

"I know," replied Holly with no trace of rancor, "that it's a very old road."

"It is indeed!" agreed Val as though Henrietta had made a very clever assertion. "Actually, it was started in 312 B.C., and parts of the original road are still in use."

"How very interesting," said Holly warmly. "And what fun to be seeing all this with a Roman." Her voice caressed the final word and embellished it with some-

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thing unspoken which Diane understood all too clearly. She was virtually telling Valentine that she considered him a Roman god.

And he was preening under her blandishments. While Diane jogged along on the other side of her pretty cousin she felt as though she might just as well be the straw-hatted horse with the red-checkered "ear-cosies" for all the attention she was getting. The only difference was that the horse apparently knew where he was headed. Diane, admittedly, did not.

The ride was long and the sun beat down upon the open carriage. Diane began to perspire and marveled that Henrietta looked as cool as when they had met at the foot of the Spanish Steps. She was relieved when they arrived at the chapel of Saint Sebastian, which marked the entrance to the catacombs, and she was even glad for the distraction of a group of sweltering tourists who were waiting for the next trip to the galleries where the early Christians had buried their dead.

A Franciscan monk in a brown habit was their guide. He padded ahead down steep stone stairs to an underground chamber inadequately lighted by a single electric bulb. After the sunlight, the darkness almost blinded Diane. She felt herself caught up in the tide of tourists and propelled forward, as though her feet were acting without direction from her brain.

The earthen floor was uneven, the passageways dark

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and narrow, and on each side of the corridors, which branched off in all directions like a maze, there were graves cut into the walls. Some still contained mummies or skeletons, and Diane shuddered slightly and stood on tiptoe to try to discover Val and Holly in the crowd. They had been right behind her on the way downstairs, but now they were not to be found.

The monk, sure-footed as a cat, hurried onward, his keys clanking and his heavy woolen skirt brushing the damp earthen floor. Every now and then he stopped to point out a martyr's coffin or to pinpoint with his flashlight the bones of an early Christian laid out on one of the shelves. There were miles and miles of these galleries, he explained, first in Italian and then in French and finally in English. As more space was needed, a second tier of corridors was built under the first.

All this was very interesting but, as they moved on through another hallway to still another room, Diane became alarmed. It would be just like Holly Harper to lead Val off down some blind alley, she thought to herself. That little idiot hasn't the sense of a peahen. She doesn't realize they could get lost.

But then she decided that Holly would be too afraid of the dark to do anything so foolish.

Afraid of the dark *with Val in tow?*

Diane cocked her head and narrowed her eyes. Who could tell? She was certain, however, that the couple

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weren't among the men, women and children who streamed past at the heels of the Franciscan father. Diane let them all overtake her to make sure and then tagged along at the rear.

She tried to listen for some echoing footstep in the gallery along which they had just come, but the catacombs behind her seemed as silent as the tombs which indeed they were. Diane's palms began to feel cold and clammy and she contemplated trying to explain to the monk that two of his original party were missing, but decided against it. There was nothing she hated more than making herself conspicuous. She'd give the pair a few more minutes. Maybe they were just loitering. Maybe they'd still turn up.

The worst that could happen, Diane supposed, was that the next conducted tour would pick them up. But the thought of being stranded, even for half an hour, among the hundreds of mummies and skeletons, with darkness enveloping the ancient bones of the dead and even obscuring Val's attractive face, was something she didn't envy Henrietta. The very thought gave her the shudders. Ugh!

Because Diane's imagination was far from underdeveloped, she quite naturally put herself in her cousin's place. The walls of the catacombs closed around her, water dripped, rats scurried, and somewhere in the

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darkness a yawning hole fell through to a still lower tier of graves.

The hold was purely fanciful, bred of horror movies and Edgar Allan Poe, but Diane's heart began to pump with fright, so real did it seem. Jealousy was routed by dismay at what *could* be happening back there in the darkness, and Diane gathered her courage and tried to catch up with the guide, planning to tell him all.

The company ahead, however, was groping its way up a winding, rock-hewn stairway at the top of which appeared a bar of light. Diane had to wait her turn, but she burst out into the sunlight of the chapel courtyard consumed by one idea—to get quickly to the monk and raise the alarm.

But suppose she was too late? Suppose her procrastination already had led to tragedy? Suppose the yawning hole had swallowed them? Her throat closed tight with terror. They could be—yes, they could be dead!

Blinking, she stood transfixed for an instant. Then she saw them! Sitting on a bench under the branches of an ancient tree, laughing into each other's eyes as though they hadn't a care in the world, were Holly and Val.

Diane's jaw firmed and her eyes narrowed. She marched over and stood in front of them with her hands on her hips. "Where," she hissed, "have you been?"

Henrietta's eyes became as round and innocent as a baby's. "Why, right here," she replied.

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"All the time?"

Holly nodded. "I knew, as soon as we got downstairs, that I wouldn't like it. All those dark alleys and dead people! So I came back. And Val came with me like a lamb." She smiled at the young Italian, then turned back to her cousin. "Guess what we've been doing?" she asked.

It wouldn't be hard, Diane thought, but she waited without speaking.

"Val's been teaching me Italian," Holly announced happily. "It's the most fun."

"I'll just bet," said Diane.

"I know some words already."

"Like what?"

Holly pursed her pink lips prettily. "Like '*Ti amo.*'"

"*Poco ci credo!*"

"What does that mean?"

"It's a little hard to translate into English," Diane cooed venomously, "but I can sum it up in one American word—Y-E-A-H?"

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have under the circumstances, and a phrase flashed into her consciousness, also out of her grandmother's vocabulary. "Carryings-on," Granny always called something questionable. And Granny, Diane was sure, would never have consented to any such "carryings-on."

"Well?" Mrs. Graham, still preening, repeated the word with a rising inflection.

"It's different, all right," Diane said.

Her mother sighed. "Don't be stuffy, darling." She glanced over her shoulder to catch a glimpse of her new self in the Italian gilt mirror which hung opposite the door. To her own reflection was added that of her husband, accompanied by a very handsome Italian gentleman whom she had never seen before.

"Marcia! What luck! I was afraid we would miss you. This is Dr. Felix Azioni, who would like us to have dinner with him tonight."

Dr. Azioni, who boasted the blackest hair, the whitest teeth and the most patrician nose Diane had ever seen, bent over her mother's hand in a manner that conveyed admiration as clearly as words. "*Enchanté*," he murmured in French which had a thrilling ring of sincerity.

Gordon Graham introduced Diane, who was rather brisk in her greeting, because she was remembering that this was the same word Val had used upon meeting Holly at the foot of the Spanish Steps. Italians, she decided at that instant, could be a trifle too suave.

OH, MOTHER!

But her mother was obviously as charmed with the doctor as he was with her. At dinner, plans for which were inevitably expanded to include Aunt Hope and Henrietta and another Italian businessman with whom Mr. Graham was dealing, Marcia was seated on Dr. Azioni's right. By the fish course they were on a first name basis, and everything became very gay.

Diane addressed herself to her food with assumed concentration which cloaked her growing feeling of disapproval. She had never seen her mother sparkle so—so synthetically, she decided. Yes, that was the word! Because Mrs. Graham, along with her new hair-do, had acquired a new personality. Her eyes seemed brighter, her laughter more vivacious and her very shoulders more self-assured.

"Your mother certainly is getting frisky," Holly muttered to Diane under the crossfire of adult conversation. "What's come over her, anyway?"

Diane shrugged. She was still furious at Henrietta about the Valentine affair, but she didn't blame her for being critical. Playing up to that doctor, that's what her mother was doing! Like a teen-ager, practically. Jabbing a her *sole meunière* nervously, Diane felt positively ashamed.

A little later on she dared look at her father to see if he too was aware of the situation, and she was gratified to find that he appeared vaguely disturbed. His con-

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versation with Aunt Hope seemed less sprightly than usual. Poor Daddy, Diane thought. He looks tired.

There was boned chicken, a salad course, then a fluffy dessert called *zabaglione* and finally fruit and coffee. By this time Henrietta was yawning. Unless she could occupy the limelight she quickly became bored.

Since they were dining in the hotel, Mr. Graham asked the girls if they wouldn't like to be excused. Holly nodded and pushed back her chair at once, but Diane agreed with a trace of reluctance. She wasn't quite sure, at this point, that it was safe to leave her mother alone.

There was no telling what she might do, left unchaperoned! The orchestra was playing a rhumba, a few Latin couples were dancing and if, at this point, the doctor should ask Marcia to dance, she might even accept. Diane knew perfectly well that her mother couldn't either tango or rhumba. But who could predict, tonight . . . ?

Sure enough, the cousins had no sooner gained the dining room door than Diane, out of the corner of her eye, saw her mother rise as Felix pulled back her chair. She stood looking back, appalled but curious. "Oh, no," she murmured softly to herself.

Holly had gone on, wandering out into the lobby to display her blonde loveliness to the tourists who hurried, unaware, from door to desk. But Diane stood transfixed, watching her mother fit herself into the curve of the

OH, MOTHER!

doctor's arm and match her step to his with apparent ease. She has good legs, Diane thought, then was shocked that the idea had leapt to her mind unbidden, as though she had been appraising another girl.

"What's the matter?" Holly wanted to know when she caught up.

"Nothing."

"Still sore about Val? I didn't ask him to bring me back out of the catacombs. He wanted to."

Diane said, looking abstracted, "Oh, forget it. What does Val matter, anyway?"

"Are you serious?"

Diane bit her lip. "Sometimes," she told her cousin, "there are more important things in life than boys."

"Like what?" Henrietta wanted to know.

Diane didn't answer. She felt deeply perturbed and indignant, as though her mother had joined the Communist party or done something really reprehensible which would reflect on them all. Her chagrin extended to her father. She felt that he was being badly used, that her mother was acting in such an undignified manner that he must be in a fume. Why, anything might happen! After such an episode as this, she could even envision—horror of horrors!—divorce!

"You're not much fun," Holly was saying. "I think I'm going to bed."

"Why don't you?" Diane snapped. "Your hotel is

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only three doors down the street. I don't imagine you'll get lost."

She went upstairs herself, taking the old-fashioned open elevator which creaked and groaned at every stop. Undressing slowly, she thought about life, endowing it in her mind with a capital L and deciding that at the age of sixteen a girl was really mature and ready to face all sorts of problems except—

Except! That word was the big catch. Except the defection of one's own mother. Acting like a schoolgirl. Behaving like Holly Harper, only worse. Flirting with a perfect stranger. How could she?

"How could she?" Diane asked the question out loud.

She lay in bed, wide awake, until her parents came into the next room. Then, tensely, she listened for the interchange she considered inevitable.

But Marcia was still laughing when she came through the door. "It was a wonderful evening," she chortled as she tossed her evening purse on the bed. "Felix is charming—but charming! I haven't had so much fun since I was Diane's age."

Although, on one hand, she trembled to think of what her father might say or do, on the other hand Diane felt that action—even violent action—was justified. "Now tell her!" she wanted to shout as she lay with clenched hands. "Now tell her off!"

But her father, whom she could see shrugging off his

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coat and hanging it on the back of a chair, said mildly, "Apparently there's something about the Italians that gets you gals."

Mrs. Graham looked thoughtful. She stood in the middle of the room with her head cocked like a waiting robin's. "They really like women," she said after a minute. "They don't just pretend."

"Oh, now," Mr. Graham said, as though he were being teased and didn't really mind it. But Diane could have screamed. She was certain that her mother's remark had implications her father couldn't even perceive. More than ever she felt as though she were sitting on a volcano. Vesuvius, were this state of affairs to continue, might even outdo its previous performance and bury them all.

There wasn't much more talk. Mrs. Graham tiptoed to the open door between the rooms, decided that Diane was sound asleep and closed the door quietly. Only the rumble of passing busses and the high-pitched honk of occasional taxis disturbed the night. But Diane lay on her back for quite a while, worrying. Somehow, she decided, her mother would have to be kept from seeing any more of Dr. Felix What's-His-Name.

The morning dawned pink and hot, and the Grahams, as usual, joined forces for the Continental breakfast of coffee, crisp rolls, butter and marmalade served on a marble-topped table in front of long bedroom windows which overlooked a square. Diane wandered into her

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parents' room in her pajamas, feeling drowsy and slightly foolish about her concern of the night before. "Warm, isn't it?" she inquired aimlessly, twisting up her hair and anchoring it to the top of her head with a barette. "I wonder how the Romans ever stood togas in the summertime?"

Neither of her parents seemed disposed to answer this fascinating question. They were looking at the door, through which the maid who had brought their breakfast tray was now returning, carrying the shoes which had been left outside the night before for polishing. The woman was smiling, her dark face alight with pleasure as though she had a share in a marvelous secret and, as she walked toward Mrs. Graham, Diane realized why. Tucked into one of her mother's high heeled black kid pumps was a bunch of Parma violets, dewy fresh.

"*Cio è bellissimo!*" cried the maid. "Beautiful!"

"*Tante grazie,*" replied Mrs. Graham wonderingly, using the Italian expression which she had learned for thanks. She picked up the violets and smelled them, murmuring "Lovely!" while Mr. Graham watched her with an expression both puzzled and curious.

"Where did they come from?" asked Diane suspiciously.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Mrs. Graham.

Diane sniffed.

"Really! I mean it."

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Diane glanced at her father with raised eyebrows. "Are you responsible for this romantic gesture, Daddy?" Gordon Graham, lounging back in his chair in a clan plaid bathrobe, his hair rumpled and his morning face mildly amused, said, "Nope."

Mrs. Graham had the grace to blush. "Maybe it was a mistake," she suggested. "Maybe whoever left the violets got the wrong pair of shoes."

"Could be," said her husband, "but I doubt it and so do you." He winked at Diane mischievously. "Your mother must have made quite a conquest, eh?"

Diane was sitting with her back as straight as a ramrod. "I don't think it's in the least funny," she said crisply, and reached for the pot of hot chocolate while her mother laid the long-stemmed purple violets gently beside her plate.

"If it was our friend, the doctor," she said to her husband, "I think it was a very gracious and unusual thing to do."

"Unusual is the word," Diane muttered, buttering a breakfast roll and helping herself generously to apricot jam. Her parents pretended that they didn't hear her, and the meal was finished in a state of truce.

But later, when her father had shaved and dressed, and after her mother, in a flurry of instructions and good-bys, had dashed off to an appointment with Aunt Hope,

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Diane came back into her parents' bedroom and perched on the edge of a straight-backed chair.

"Daddy," she asked without preamble, "how long are you going to let this sort of thing go on?"

"What sort of thing?" asked Gordon Graham, who had been concentrating on knotting his tie.

"Violets in Mother's shoes!" Diane snorted. "I never heard of such foolishness."

Mr. Graham's hands held the tie motionless for a few seconds, and he regarded his daughter's expression in the glass. "Are you serious?" he asked.

"I've never been more serious in my life."

"Well, for Pete's sake!"

"You," said Diane with a shake of her forefinger, "should be serious, too."

Mr. Graham put on his coat before he replied. Then he said, conversationally, "Why don't you come take a little walk with me? I've got half an hour before I'm due for an appointment, and I think you and I have a couple of things to straighten out."

"I'll say!" Diane acquiesced, hoping that the two monosyllables spoke volumes. She rode down on the elevator with her father in a silence which was so trenchant that she might have been about to explode.

Once out on the sunny street, however, she didn't know how to reopen the subject which had obscured all other considerations, even Holly's intrigue with Valen-

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tine. It was her father who said, in a manner which Diane considered deceptively offhand, "I take it you don't approve of your mother's behavior with Dr. Azioni. Am I right?"

Diane countered with another question. "Do you?" She looked as indignant as possible, with her chin high and her eyes blazing, but her father only thrust forth his lower lip contemplatively.

"Well, now," he said, "I think a flirtation is sort of good for a woman, once in a while. Gives her a lift." His eyes twinkled as he considered the effect of this remark on his daughter, who was marching along by his side with a definitely militant air.

Diane simply looked incredulous. "Don't be a dope, Daddy," she cautioned. "You don't know these Italian men. Why, they're terrible. They follow you on the street and they make eyes at you, even if they've never met you. After they get acquainted—well!—"

It was Gordon Graham's turn to look concerned. "Have you been having any trouble with Valentine?" he asked sharply.

"Val? Good grief, no. But I'm thinking of Mother. She isn't—oh, Daddy, you know, she isn't experienced, really. She hasn't been around."

"Oh, no?" queried Mr. Graham.

Diane began to flounder. "I mean she doesn't realize

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she's making herself conspicuous, trying to do all sorts of different dances, and—and—"

"You mean she wasn't acting like a mother last night."

"Far from it," Diane agreed.

Gordon Graham laughed out loud. "I'll tell you something, chicken," he said affectionately, "and I want you to pay close attention, because it's important. Your mother is a very attractive woman, and by some standards, she is even comparatively young. If she wants to kick up her heels a little, I see no harm in it. I rather enjoy it."

"Enjoy it?" Diane interrupted. "How can you. I should think you'd be—be humiliated."

Mr. Graham shook his head. "I'm not. I'm proud of Marcia, and proud that a man as perceptive as Felix Azioni finds her charming. A flirtation, Diane dear, isn't serious. It's just play-acting, having fun." He looked down into his daughter's eyes inquiringly to see if she understood what he was trying to say.

But Diane was frowning. "Mother's married," she said.

Again her father burst out laughing. "But she isn't dead! We're people, your mother and I, not just parents. You know," he added with an air of discovery, "I'll bet you're just finding that out."

"Nothing of the sort," Diane muttered, but the sentence struck home. It flashed through her mind that never, before this trip to Europe, had she thought of her

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mother and father in connection with other personalities. She had accepted them without question, wholly and completely, without wondering whether they were gay or sober, handsome or homely, popular or dull. They were family, her family, and they fitted into a pattern. But now the flimsy tissue of the pattern had been crumpled and torn. Never again would they settle back into that comfortable groove.

Mr. Graham, stopping at a corner, was glancing at his watch. Then, with a grin, he grasped Diane's elbow and squeezed it. "Don't worry about us, baby," he advised. "We get along, your mother and I. We understand each other. As a matter of fact, you're our only problem, right now."

"I—?" Diane was flabbergasted.

"Sure. We've got to grow you up, and that isn't easy. Not," her father added roguishly, "with all these fascinating Italians hanging around."

Diane sighed. "Val has gone over to the enemy, meaning Holly," she told him.

"Well, you just go get him right back!" her father ordered before he bent to kiss her lightly on the forehead in parting. "Act like your mother's daughter. Be a *femme fatale*!"

"I don't think we can afford two in the same family," Diane murmured. And then she grinned, and suddenly

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the sun was shining more brightly, the city was more exciting, and life looked very full of good things to come.

"Arrivederci!"

"Addio! And Daddy—?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks for telling me the facts of life. I guess I was getting pretty mixed up."

"No wonder!" called Mr. Graham over his shoulder. "Violets in her shoes!" And he twirled his finger beside his forehead in a typically French gesture which made Diane laugh.

Holly Bright

IT WAS INEVITABLE, DIANE REALIZED, THAT AUNT HOPE and her cousin Holly should decide to follow them to the Riviera. "Copycats," she muttered sulkily. "At least they might have gone to Nice or Monte Carlo where Holly could have a little competition from the bikini crowd. Why do they have to trail along with us?"

"I can't understand your attitude," said her mother stiffly. She was looking forward to a few days of feminine chatter with her sister.

"I can," said Gordon Graham wickedly. "Diane's afraid Holly will cramp her style."

“Cramp it?” Diane exploded. “My style’s as good as hospitalized already. Why I couldn’t have had a cousin with buck teeth and braces, I’ll never know.”

"Then you'd be ashamed of her," murmured Mrs. Graham.

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"I think that would be delightful," Diane replied, and meant it. "I'd especially like to feel sorry for Holly. Imagine!" But she couldn't imagine, in all honesty.

"At least you'll have a day and a half to case the joint," put in her father slangily. "You'll be the early bird—and you know the old one about the worm."

"I'm not boy crazy," said Diane primly.

"Oh, no?" asked her parents simultaneously, then burst into laughter, as though they had made some rare witticism.

Diane maintained a dignified silence for ten minutes, but this did not mean that she had abandoned the subject. "I think Holly's trouble," she said finally, "is that she never learned to play Finders-Keepers. She doesn't obey any of the rules."

This elicited no response from her mother, who was studying a map in *Europa Touring* which was open on her lap. Her father, engaged in the tricky process of lighting his pipe with one hand while he steered the car with the other, merely grunted. "What kind of a hotel is this we're heading for? The small-quiet or the large-luxury type?"

"Neither," said Marcia Graham. "It's supposed to be perfectly beautiful," she mentioned dreamily. "Right on the Mediterranean at Beaulieu-sur-Mer, about half an hour out of Nice."

"Complete with swimming pool?" asked Diane.

HOLLY BRIGHT

Her father snorted. "Don't be silly. You swim in the sea."

"I think you can do either," suggested Mrs. Graham.

Puffing on his pipe meditatively, the driver groaned. "It sounds expensive," he said.

"No more expensive," promised Marcia, "than any good resort hotel at home. Besides, Gordon, this is your vacation. You can afford to be a little indulgent for a few days."

This should have been fair warning to Diane that she was approaching something extra special, but the reality was even brighter than the picture her mother painted. The hotel was perched on a rocky promontory jutting out into the blue-green sea, and their room, furnished with French provincial antiques, opened on a balcony which overlooked a long dining terrace and an immaculate pool. Sailboats and speedboats appeared like stage properties in the distance, and near at hand, in a miniature harbor, a lean brown lad in white swimming trunks was putting on a pair of water skis.

Diane gazed down at him with a sudden sense of anticipation. "Look, Daddy! Water-skiing. Do you suppose you could stake me to half an hour or so?"

Her father grinned. "Since this is my week for being indulgent, you mean?" He came and stood beside her. "Aha, I begin to understand!"

Diane had the grace to blush. "I like water-skiing,"

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she insisted, "and I used to be fairly good at it. I learned that summer at camp—you remember—and later—"

Her father stopped her. "Later may be too late," he whispered. "You'd better hurry, Early Bird."

Changing from her cotton dress into a swim-suit in one of the blue and white striped bath houses on a level below the swimming pool, Diane felt full of excitement. It was a beautiful day! She did like water-skiing! And the fact that the boy in the white trunks looked distinctly American and had been up and off on his skis like a gull skimming over the water had nothing to do with the case. Her father was just being foolish. He was teasing, teasing in that uncomfortable way which older people seemed to find amusing. Yet her fingers trembled as she tried to hurry a little faster. Just in case—

The girl who sauntered along the paved top of the jetty which hooked out to enclose the small harbor betrayed no apparent haste. She walked slowly, her head high, the trim suit with little-boy pants fitting her slender figure snugly. She looked quite at ease.

Abandoning his rope tow as the speedboat curved off in an arc from the launching steps, the skier Diane had watched from her balcony glided right in beside her, then gradually let his body sink into the water while he kicked off his skis.

"Hi," he said emerging.

HOLLY BRIGHT

"Hi," said Diane, and grinned because she had been right. "You are an American."

"You bet." He towed the skis into the steps and said casually, "I'm finished. You planning to take a ride?"

Diane eyed the long runners a trifle warily. They looked very narrow, more like snow skis than the water skis to which she was accustomed. "I'd like to," she admitted, "but these are different. I don't know whether I could manage them."

"Sure you could," said the boy. "Once you're up, it's a cinch. I'll help you get started if you like."

"That would be nice of you." Diane smiled. "I'd better explain. My name's Diane Graham. I'm traveling with my parents and we just arrived today."

"Glad to meet you, Diane. I'm Spike Carter, Spoffard Carter, if you want to be Back Bay. It's a family name."

"Oh, you're from Boston?"

"That's right." Spike turned the skis and lowered them into the water, apparently no more impressed that they should meet on the French Riviera than that they might have happened upon one another on a beach on Cape Cod. "Look. Let me show you how to get your feet into the bindings."

Diane descended the slippery steps timidly. "Do you think I'd better get wet first?"

Spike shook his head. "No need to. The water's not cold."

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Raising one hand, he hailed the boatman and signaled him to come in. Then he caught the line the fellow hurled to him and payed it out to its full length. "Here," he said, handing the stick to Diane. "I'll grab you around the waist until you get your balance. Tell me when you think you're set."

Diane swallowed hard and tried to concentrate. The skis felt abnormally long and awkward and her knees were like jelly.

"Now?"

"Now."

The driver of the speedboat gunned his motor. Diane tried to get the skis parallel and stiffen her legs. There was a strong pull on her arms. She was up. She was off. Not off across the water like a bird—like Spike—but off the skis, floundering around trying to disengage the bindings from her feet.

Hair streaming in her eyes, because she disdained a cap, Diane towed the awkward runners back to the landing. "That was pretty," she gasped.

"Try again," said Spike insistently. "Once you're up—really up, I mean—you'll be all right."

He sounded a good deal more confident than Diane felt. She began to wish she'd stayed in her room and taken a nap instead of coming in search of adventure. She should have known the minute she examined these treacherous-looking, abnormally slender hickories that

they were European booby traps. But now she was, in a sense, committed. She couldn't admit defeat after one attempt.

The boatman was circling again, coming in. Once more Spike caught the line, once more gave her calm and precise instructions.

"Ready?"

"Ready," Diane gulped.

But she was no more ready than she had been before. Her arms felt as though they were being wrenched from their sockets with the sudden tug of the rope. She was up for one fleeting instant, then off balance and submerged in the water again.

"You can't give up now," Spike said as she retrieved the skis and swam back to him. "You almost had it."

"Almost isn't enough," Diane gulped.

"That's the old fighting spirit!" Spike praised, although Diane had never felt less like scrapping in her life.

"I don't think—" she started, but was never given a chance to explain that her remark was being misinterpreted. Spike had caught the line again and was handing it to her. "Hurry up. Time is money in this sport, girl! You want to get at least one ride."

Gritting her teeth, although she felt uncomfortably close to tears, Diane crouched in the water, her knees bent, the tips of the skis just surfacing, and Spike's hands firm around her waist.

TOUJOURS DIANE

"Are you ready?"

Diane took a long breath, but her answer was only a nod. Once more the boat was off with a rush at the other end of the line which bound her to it. With a supreme effort she stiffened her knees, came out of her crouch, felt the breeze of motion tug at her hair and the water foam behind her.

"Bravo!" called Spike. "Good girl!"

Once up, as Spike had promised, it was easier to keep her balance than she had expected. Unlike the broad water skis on which she had learned at camp, these were racers, giving new zest to the sport. The boatman was wise. He didn't try any tricks, but held an even speed and steered his craft in easy circles. When Diane released the line and skimmed in to the dock as Spike had done, she was laughing happily. "That was wonderful!" she called.

"Sure!" said the American boy in an I-told-you-so tone of voice. "Want to go out again?"

Diane shook her head. "I think I'll wait until tomorrow." She squinted at the sun and added, "It's getting rather late and I'd like to have a swim in the pool before I go up."

"Mind if I join you?"

"I'd love it," Diane said.

Half an hour later, sitting on a mat by the side of the pool and toweling her hair while Spike went over to the

HOLLY BRIGHT

outside bar to order a lemon squash and an orangeade, Diane felt a pleasant sense of accomplishment. Maybe her father was right about the early bird. Spoffard Carter. A distinguished sort of name. An attractive sort of boy. You couldn't possibly think of him as a worm!

At dinnertime Spike came over to the Grahams' table and invited Diane to go for a moonlight sail.

"May I?" she asked her parents, after she had introduced them.

"Is it perfectly safe?" Marcia asked cautiously.

Spike nodded. "I've handled a boat since I was eleven years old, and there's a very slight breeze."

It turned out to be a beautiful evening. The lights of the villages and cities along the Cote d'Azur twinkled like thousands of yellow diamonds in the distance. The moon was full and the water, so bright in the daytime, was black and mysterious. This was the Riviera as Diane had always hoped to see it, the Riviera of novels, of romance.

She felt pleasantly drowsy and content to let Spike do most of the talking. He was staying here for another week, she discovered, and he was obviously delighted to have met a congenial American girl. "Tomorrow," he planned happily, "we can go water skiing again, and in the evening there's a dance at the hotel."

Tomorrow, thought Diane as her heart dropped with an uncomfortable thud, Holly arrives.

TOU JOURS DIANE

"They clear the terrace above the pool," Spike was saying. "It should be nice, out under the stars."

"My cousin will be here tomorrow," said Diane.

"Your cousin? Male or female?"

"Female, very," replied Diane, drawing her sweater more closely about her shoulders. Whenever her thoughts dwelt on Henrietta she always felt a little apprehensive and cold.

And with reason! Holly walked into the hotel like a leading lady hastening from a star's dressing room onto the stage. She took in the situation with a glance, gave it her full and starry-eyed approval, and hurried right into a new swim-suit her mother had allowed her to buy in Rome.

It was a daring suit, cut with no back at all, but with a high halter neck in front so that she looked demure on first glance but provocative on closer inspection. "I don't," Aunt Hope murmured, "consider it entirely suitable for a girl Henrietta's age, but she did so love it—"

Diane pursed her lips. No wonder, she thought. It did the most marvelous things for Holly's figure, which would have looked good enough in a Mother Hubbard, but which was set off to a special advantage by this Italian model. No wonder Spike, on first seeing her, gave a long wolf whistle. "Is that the cousin?" he asked. "Wow!"

HOLLY BRIGHT

"Wow is the way every man from sixteen to sixty always feels about Holly," Diane announced a trifle sadly. "Come on over and I'll introduce you. Then do we go water skiing or has it been nice knowing you?"

"We go water skiing. We had a date, didn't we?"

"Dates," said Diane gloomily, "have been broken before."

But Spike, she recognized, was a gentleman of his word. They went water skiing while Holly displayed herself decoratively in the sunshine beside the pool and quickly collected a coterie of admirers.

First, there was the swimming instructor and lifeguard, a broad-shouldered, bronzed young man with bleached hair and eager dark eyes. Through him Henrietta quickly met the other unattached men under twenty who were available at the hotel, and from the water Diane could see her holding court. Only once in a while did she turn her pretty head in the direction of the water-skiers. Diane could almost hear her say, "My cousin is so active, so athletic. It must be wonderful, really, to have such zest."

Of course, as Diane well knew, Holly wouldn't have traded places for a hundred dollars. Her blonde hair was carefully set, so that it had just the proper amount of turn to the ends, but if she got it wet it would be either too curly or not curly enough. She always swam with a cap, and refused to dive on the grounds that her ears

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were very sensitive. Diane considered this statement dubious to the extreme. It was Holly's vanity that was sensitive, she would be willing to wager, and not her ears.

The morning passed much too quickly. Growing accustomed to the European skis, Diane began to show off a little, hoping that she cut a good figure from the standpoint of the people at the pool. A little commendation would have been very welcome, but when she and Spike dismissed their boatman and walked up the steps to join Henrietta and her crowd, nobody mentioned their performance. All Holly said when her china blue eyes fell on her cousin was, "Heavens, dear, you look like a drowned rat."

Immediately, so strong was the power of suggestion, Diane began to feel like one. She wished she had a dry swimming suit to change to, and she wished she had used a cap and saved her hair. But instead of admitting to either of these facts, she pretended to be more athletic than ever, and went down to the diving board end of the pool to practice jackknives and half gainers for twenty minutes. Lunch was bound to rescue her, sooner or later. Meanwhile, she could at least look absorbed by her own concerns.

But as far as lunch was concerned, Holly had already laid plans. "Mother has gone off to Eze with your parents," she told Diane when she finally gave up diving.

HOLLY BRIGHT

"We're going to be served down here so we won't have to change, if that's all right with you."

Diane had to grin and bear it. She dried her hair and went back to the dressing room to comb it and put on fresh lipstick, but she still looked far from glamorous. Freckles seemed to have appeared where no freckles were before, and her eyes were red from the chlorine in the water of the pool.

She wasn't in the least surprised that Ricco, the swimming instructor, Spike Carter and a French lad named Jacques also elected to lunch by the pool that day. Holly was a siren in that swim-suit. She looked like a movie starlet, sitting in the sun with her pale hair shining and her skin acquiring a becoming pink glow.

At two o'clock Diane decided to go take a nap. She wasn't sleepy; she was simply outclassed, so she wanted to retreat while she could still go in good order, before her escape became a rout. It didn't surprise her, a few minutes later, to see Spike leading Holly down to the dock where the sailboats tied up. She watched him dicker with one of the owners, arrange a price, help Holly into the boat, and take the tiller in hand.

"Well, it was fun while it lasted," she muttered to herself.

Throwing herself on the bed, she reached for a magazine, but she didn't feel like reading, actually. Restless, she got in the shower and washed her hair, then set it.

TOUJOURS DIANE

I can't compete with Henrietta but I can still look my best, she decided, so she unpacked her mother's manicure equipment and spent half an hour on her nails. Finally, she plucked her eyebrows, a job she hated, but they always looked better when the stragglers were cleaned out. This finished, there was nothing else to do until her hair dried. This could be accomplished best on the balcony where the sun was still strong, and it was from here that Diane watched Holly and Spike come home.

Goodness, they've been out a long time, she thought to herself, and noticed that the breeze had died. She also noticed, for the first time, that Holly had gone out in the boat without a beach coat or sweater. In this sun, she thought, she's asking for trouble. I wonder if she doesn't realize how strong it is.

She was still wondering, a few minutes later, when Henrietta knocked at the bedroom door. "Do you have any Noxema, by any chance?" she asked.

Diane shook her head. "Never use the stuff." Then she gave a low whistle. "Good grief, Holly! You really have got a burn."

Henrietta glanced down at her bright pink arms, then leaned forward to inspect her knees. "It doesn't hurt yet."

"It will," said Diane. "Let me see your back."

Henrietta turned.

"Zowie!"

HOLLY BRIGHT

Walking over to the mirror, Holly said, "It's not really that bad."

But half an hour later, the pink had turned to scarlet and she began to feel chilly and feverish by turns. Even this she could have endured, but one thing she hadn't reckoned with. The skin covered by the front of the highly styled suit was creamy and white. Only from the neck up and from the shoulders down was Henrietta a bright and unbecoming red.

The sunburn could have been painted on, so absurd did it look, but the appalling truth dawned on both girls at the same time—it was there to stay.

"There's a dance tonight," Diane murmured wickedly. "We have to dress."

"Do you think I don't know it?" Holly asked.

Spread on her bed were the only two dance frocks with which she was traveling. Diane considered both of them dreamy, but they were sleeveless and strapless and out of the question this evening. In either, a glaring oblong of white skin would make her look like a freak.

Suddenly Diane began to laugh. She knew it was mean, but she couldn't help it. "I'm sorry," she gasped, "but it's so darned funny. When you called me a drowned rat this morning, I never guessed you'd be a boiled lobster tonight!"

Henrietta, to her credit, managed a rueful grin. "As the French would put it, *touché!*" she said.

CHATEAU CRAZY

Toby's letter, like Toby himself, was more flamboyant.

"Mother is sewing name tapes madly," he told her, "and college is looming like a cyclone in my path. I pine for you, pet. You could comfort my final hours, instead of cozing up to some sneaky Pete from *la belle France*. Behave, now! Keep sweet. And write me reams about all your adventures."

Diane could feel the two letters now, crackling in her blouse pocket. They were heart-warming, somehow, a tangible part of Cranford and everything she loved. She felt a twinge of homesickness and was glad that their sailing date was drawing steadily closer. Yet the summer had gone like the wind, actually. And every minute of it—well almost every minute, she qualified, remembering Henrietta—had been fun.

Mr. Graham began to whistle. He was feeling relaxed and gay this morning, because the business part of his trip was finished. Now he could, as he put it, "play."

"What do you mean by play?" Diane had asked, curious. It seemed a strange word for an adult to use.

"Well," Mr. Graham explained, "I mean doing what your mother thinks is fun." He wouldn't admit it, but Diane was sure that he was much more sprightly now that Rome and the fascinating Dr. Azioni were many miles behind.

TOUJOURS DIANE

"And what do you consider fun, Mummy?" Diane pressed.

"All my life," said Mrs. Graham with great seriousness, "I have wanted to travel, unhurried, along the river Loire, lingering from chateau to chateau." Her eyes grew dreamy and she clasped her hands. "I remember a history of art course in college—" she began.

But Diane interrupted. "You can't do much lingering in four days," she mentioned as the turrets of a huge castle loomed in the distance. "These dumps are big."

"Diane!"

"Sorry, Mommy. I didn't mean to be irreverent. But really, I can't see the attraction. I mean, once you've seen one, you've seen them all."

"Nothing of the sort," Mrs. Graham said in rebuke. "Chateaux have personalities, just like people. At least so I understand. Chambord is a perfect model of the French Renaissance just as Versailles is a model of the '*Grand Siècle*.' Cheverney is pre-classic. And Blois—"

"Darling, you're talking like a Baedeker," mentioned Mr. Graham. "I'll go chateau-chasing with you, but I want to make one point. Two a day. No more. I have flat feet."

"I know, dear," purred his wife. "I always worry about you when you play thirty-six holes of golf."

Diane snickered wickedly. "There's only one chateau I want to see."

CHATEAU CRAZY

"Well, one is one more than I bargained for," murmured her mother. "Which is that?"

"The one where we're going to stay."

Her father groaned. "Oh, great Scott, I'd forgotten that. Couldn't we change our plans, Marcia, and go to a nice small middle-class hotel?"

"We could not," said Mrs. Graham firmly, and Diane knew that in this she would be adamant. A leading fashion magazine had run an article, last spring, on chateaux which would take paying guests, and Mrs. Graham had gone to a great deal of trouble to get reservations at one of them which had been described in glowing terms by the writer. Le Chardonneret, it was called and, according to the report, it was an authentic castle, run like a great private house, with atmosphere augmented by antiques. Her mother was looking forward to their stay here as one of the high spots of the trip. She had seen enough of hotel rooms. Now she wanted to get an inside glimpse of French country life.

The road narrowed, and they began to cut back to the point where a branch of the Loire river met the Cher. Le Chardonneret lay in deep country, near the village of Cour-Chevéreney, which was almost as difficult to find as a needle in a haystack, and about as large.

Mr. Graham inquired the way from a peasant pushing a barrow of kindling, then from a postman riding a bicycle and finally from a farmer leading a recalcitrant

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goat across the road. They all listened carefully to his inflection, professed to understand completely, but pointed in quite different directions. "There's one thing," commented Diane, "about the French. They always tell you something. They never admit they just don't know."

Somehow, eventually, they found the proper road and came upon a sign which pointed back through what appeared to be a forest. The drive was grass-grown and the ruts were deep, but Mrs. Graham seemed pleased. "This is what they call the park," she said.

Within a few moments, from the top of a small rise, they looked down upon the chateau itself. They were approaching it broadside, and could see that it was long and lean and stark, a red brick façade faced at the corners with a crenelated molding of white marble. The turn-around was dusty and the place had a curiously deserted air.

"Think this is right?" Gordon Graham asked.

"It looks as though it belongs to Charles Addams," commented Diane.

"I think it looks very impressive," said Mrs. Graham staunchly. "There must be at least twenty-five rooms on the second floor."

"Did they actually confirm these reservations, Marcia?" Mr. Graham slowed to ease the Minx over a piece of jagged stone.

"Of course they did!"

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"Le Chardonneret, here we come!" shouted Diane's father. "I wonder whether spooks make good chamber-maids?"

There were no ghosts at the chateau, however. At least not the kind who make beds. As a matter of fact, the Grahams quickly discovered, there was nobody to make the beds, except the guests themselves.

Le Chardonneret was run by a youngish French couple who had inherited the old house, once great, now crumbling about their heads. They needed paying guests, ("That's for sure!" said Mr. Graham) but they accepted them with reluctance, and only the very hardy stayed longer than overnight.

Diane and her family were among the fit and courageous. Once unpacked, Mr. Graham refused to repack and move on. "Besides," he said judicially. "You wanted atmosphere. You've got it." This was certainly true.

The Grahams had a suite on the second floor which was truly palatial, with cupids scampering over the painted ceilings and great sleigh beds draped in ancient red and cream striped satin. There was even a connecting bathroom, except that there was nothing whatever in it except a washstand and a pitcher of cold water. After searching for the better part of an hour, Mrs. Graham finally discovered a tub in a cavernous room on the

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third floor, but it took Diane to unearth an even more important piece of equipment.

"The 'john,'" she announced at long last, "is hidden in a closet downstairs." This was it, the one and only, shared alike by Madame, Monsieur, the Grahams and the English family who were the only other guests. The vacationing Britons, a certain Lady Latham and her two children, were the saving grace.

They hailed from the Isle of Jersey, and they were not in the least confounded by the attitude of their hosts. With rare good humor, they welcomed the Grahams into their midst and treated the whole affair as though it were a wonderful lark. Diane immediately became interested in Clarissa Latham, a dark, straight-haired girl about her own age, lean and tanned and completely at home in the chateau. She and her brother, George, a tow-headed boy of thirteen, immediately took Diane on a trip of exploration. With them she discovered the abandoned nursery quarters on the third floor, ceilings crumbling, and bats wheeling suddenly out of the dim corners to frighten the unwary. Diane screamed and ran, hands to her head, but Clarissa and George just laughed. "You haven't seen anything yet," they promised. "Wait until we take you down to the wine cellars. They're really creepy, like something out of Madame Tussaud's."

That was enough for Diane. "I think I'll stay above ground, thanks," she told them. And she was as good as

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her word. The next morning, when her parents left for the day armed with guidebooks and walking shoes, Diane went out to the overgrown garden, curled up on a stone bench, and started a letter to Jim.

This state of quietude lasted ten minutes. Then Clarissa and George came bounding out of the house to announce that Madame and Monsieur had gone to Tours for the day with Lady Latham and that they were allowed to ride the horses if they liked. Of horses there were two, a sway-backed old animal and a frisky youngster whom Diane was afraid to mount, but who responded to Clarissa's firm hand with surprising docility. George got Diane up on the nag and she bounced around the circular earthen drive in Clarissa's wake, raising a dust and an appetite. The one man-of-all-work on the place, a young Italian gardener with black curly hair and broad shoulders, leaned idly against the fence watching them ride as though there were no chicken houses to clean out or grass to cut or wood to chop.

Presently a young French girl, who came once a day to wash dishes, joined them. Her name, Diane discovered, was Fleurette. She was seventeen and was expecting to be married at Christmas time to a village lad. The gardener, Cesare, looked at her languorously, but she ignored him and pretended that she mustn't linger because there was so much to do in the house.

There was, indeed, as Diane well knew, but Fleurette

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seemed indisposed to hurry about putting the kitchen to rights. When Diane came in later, foraging for a glass of milk and some bread and cheese—or at least something to hold body and soul together, since nobody had said anything about lunch—the dishes were still stacked in the soapstone sink and fruit flies were hovering in a cloud over a bowl of rotting peaches. Fleurette, like her mistress, was evidently not a housekeeper at heart.

“S’il vous plaît,” Diane began, then stopped short as a shout from George echoed through the lower floor. “Cesare’s been hurt,” he called. “I think Fleurette had better take a look at him.”

Cesare, yielding to a sudden spurt of energy, had climbed a ladder to repair a piece of flapping tin on the top of one of the outbuildings when a rung near the top gave way. Falling, he had gashed his head badly on a jagged stone so that his face was streaming with blood. He was sitting on the ground, holding one shoulder, apparently rather dazed.

Clarissa, who had tethered her mare, stood beside him looking down with an expression Diane couldn’t fathom. “I think his shoulder’s dislocated,” she said as the rest of the group ran across the lawn. “He doesn’t seem to be able to get up.”

It was plain to see that the gardener was in pain. “We ought to get a doctor,” said Diane at once, but Clarissa countered with “How can we?”

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"There's the telephone." She knelt beside Cesare, although she was sickened by the sight of blood, and asked, "*Où est le docteur?*"

This elicited no response whatever. Cesare either did not understand her accent or he was in a state of shock. His injury could be serious, Diane realized. It might be a concussion. Perhaps he should be taken to a hospital. Certainly he should be persuaded to lie down.

But Cesare just sat there, swaying slightly, an agonized expression on his face, while Diane crouched beside him anxiously and Clarissa looked on as though she wished she were anywhere but here.

Fleurette had gone into the house for a basin of water and a cloth, and she was already walking back across the barnyard when Diane said, "We ought to do something!"

"But what?" Clarissa asked. "After all, it isn't our responsibility." She looked as though she were above it all, and even vaguely annoyed that she should be involved.

Fleurette was talking to Cesare in a spate of colloquial French which Diane couldn't begin to understand, but his eyes still looked glazed and unseeing. He winced as she began to dab at his face with the wet cloth, but seemed to be incapable of making a constructive move.

"*Un médecin*," Diane repeated to Fleurette, remembering the correct word for doctor. "*C'est nécessaire.*"

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The peasant girl shook her head. "*Tout ira bien*," she insisted, as though the injury were not much more than a scratch.

Diane wasn't sure that everything would be all right at all. She had heard about the seriousness of concussions. There had been a boy at school—

And then, as she stood there, she realized that she was the only one of the group with what she would call "gumption." Clarissa and her brother were growing more remote by the moment, Fleurette was murmuring something homeopathic about a "*tisane*" and Cesare was obviously in no condition to help himself. If there was to be action, it was she who must act.

She tried to telephone first, but the demand for "*information*," spoken with her best French accent, only elicited a five minute news bulletin. She searched for a list of emergency numbers, but could find nothing, and it was obvious that neither Fleurette nor Cesare intended to help her locate a doctor. Their reaction was typically peasant. They simply clammed up.

Finally, unable to get to first base, she hurried back to the barnyard. Any hope that the situation might have improved was ill-founded. Cesare now looked definitely gray.

Even Fleurette was beginning to appear concerned. She expressed this by glancing at Diane and shrugging. "*Il a mauvaise mine*," she admitted, and this time she

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spoke slowly enough for Diane to understand. She was saying that the gardener looked ill.

Diane nodded her head vigorously. "*C'est grave!*" she insisted, and tried to tell the French girl that they should try to get him to a hospital, or at least a doctor, but again Fleurette's response was a shrug.

If only the grown-ups would come home! But it was barely noon, and none of them could be expected before five o'clock. Diane glanced down the long empty drive and began to feel a trifle frantic. Then her eye fell on an old pickup truck which was parked just outside the barnyard gate.

Instantly her brain snapped to attention. "I'll drive him into Blois to the hospital," she told Clarissa. "You and George get a mattress off one of the beds and we'll hoist him into the back."

"But—"

"Do as I say," Diane surprised herself by ordering. Then she went over and pulled herself up to the high front seat with hands that trembled. Could she drive the confounded contraption. And did she dare?

Her chin firmed. Although it was geared differently from the Minx, she found first and second and reverse. She also, after several minutes, discovered the starter and got the engine going by the time the Lathams appeared, lugging the heavy mattress they had dragged downstairs.

With Fleurette's help they laid it flat in the back of

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the truck, where it trembled with the vibration of the car. Then they tackled Cesare.

He proved to be more of a problem than the mattress. Every time Fleurette and Diane tried to lift him he resisted and uttered a stream of unintelligible imprecations. The Lathams, who considered their duty done, stood by silently. Obviously, they considered the whole thing was a mistake.

How they finally got the gardener into the truck Diane never quite knew, but suddenly she found herself joggling down the rutted drive behind the snorting engine while Cesare huddled, groaning, in the rear.

Now she became newly alarmed. Suppose it had been wrong to move him at all? Suppose he died on the way to Blois? The city was fifteen kilometers distant, more or less, and once she was there she still had to inquire her way to a hospital.

Clinique—that was the word! Diane practised inquiring, "*Où est la clinique?*" She would find a *gendarme* on the bridge which crossed the river, and she would point to Cesare. Certainly the policeman would understand.

The dusty drive through the park seemed endless, but finally she came to the secondary road which led to the Loire. Soon the village of Cour-Cheverney appeared, a picture-postcard in the distance, yellowed houses facing one another in two prim lines beyond a stony brook.

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Before she knew it she was chugging along the main street, trying to keep her wits about her and anxious to jar the injured man as little as possible on the cobblestones.

To the shopkeepers, closing their shutters for the lunch hours, and the laborers on their way home, the American girl must have been a peculiar sight, perched like a pixie behind the wheel of the open truck. People stopped to stare, then discovered Cesare on his mattress, and suddenly they closed in around the slow-moving vehicle.

Diane pulled on the emergency brake, barely missing a child with a fishing rod who ran in front of the wheels. "What—?"

But the question was smothered by the excited French which flowed from a dozen throats. The villagers ignored Diane. Cesare was the hero of the hour. And unexpectedly, back among his own people, the gardener began to talk. He pointed to his head and his shoulder, he rolled his eyes and he groaned—magnificently.

"I'm taking him to a doctor," Diane tried to explain, but her girlish voice was drowned in the general melee.

Before she knew it Cesare had been helped down from the truck and, surrounded by his compatriots, was being led away. Men were supporting him under the elbows. Women were mopping at his bloody face with their handkerchiefs. Everybody was commiserating with him at once, and Cesare, bathed in this milk of human kind-

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ness, was recovering more rapidly than Diane had dreamed possible.

She even saw one man clap him on his injured back and was about to shout out some caution, but the gardener scarcely winced. Before he disappeared with his coterie through the door of a nearby house, he turned and waved with his good arm, smiling and calling, "*Merci beaucoup, Mademoiselle!*"

Diane sat in the truck in the empty street, furious. She had never seen such a performance in her life. Never! She could cheerfully have consigned Cesare and all his ilk to limbo. Of all the nerve!

Grinding the gears viciously, she got the pickup truck started once more, and somehow she managed to turn around and make the trip back to Le Chardonneret.

The place looked as deserted as it had on the Grahams' arrival. Fleurette was languidly running a mop over the entrance hall and Clarissa and George had left a note that they had gone for a swim in the Cher. When Diane joined them they were diving into the river from the limb of an overhanging tree and they seemed to have forgotten Cesare.

It was only on their way home that George asked casually, "Make out all right with the truck?"

"Oh, fine," said Diane. She was still too angry to talk.

The adults drifted in about six, Mr. and Mrs. Graham arriving just ahead of the others. Diane's mother kicked

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off her shoes half-way upstairs and padded along to the room in her stockinged feet, but she insisted that she was "happy-tired" and that her eyes were full of memories.

"Did you have fun, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, neat fun," Diane said bitterly. "I'm learning a lot about the French—and the English too."

"I was hoping you'd come with us tomorrow," Mrs. Graham suggested, "in the morning, at least. We're going to Chenonceaux, where your namesake used to live."

"My namesake?"

"Diane de Poitiers. She was one of the three women who built it—and it's supposed to be the loveliest of them all."

"OK," agreed Diane unexpectedly. "I'll come. I might as well go chateau-crazy one way as another, I guess."

"Now what," asked Gordon Graham of his wife after his daughter had left the room, "do you suppose she meant by that?"



Brittany Bonus

PETER CROWELL CAUGHT UP WITH THE GRAHAMS IN Brittany, at the end of a fortnight's bicycle trip during which he had been staying at youth hostels and swinging around the coast from Dinard to the Pointe du Raz.

His sun tan matched his khaki shorts, his hair was bleached almost white and he was thinner than ever. When he walked into the lobby of the hotel in Quimper, where the Grahams were staying for a few days, Diane scarcely recognized him, but she thought he looked wonderful.

The first thing he did was to extend an invitation to the American family to stay overnight with his parents at their summer place on the south coast of England, immediately before their sailing from Southampton, which was within easy driving distance.

"Why, I think that would be lovely," said Marcia

Graham quickly. She had always wanted to stay at a British country house.

Diane was equally delighted. She liked Peter, and was interested in meeting his "mater" and "pater," as he sometimes called them, because they sounded, somehow, less like real people than like characters in a book.

The second thing Peter did was arrange an excursion. During his bicycle tour he had run across Armand Lassiat, the young French hairdresser who had been seated at the Grahams' table on shipboard. Armand was at his home in Douarnenez, a picturesque fishing village about thirty kilometers up the coast, and he was very anxious for Peter to bring Diane to lunch.

"When?" Diane asked, interested.

"Tomorrow," said Peter. It was a Sunday.

Diane turned to her father. "May I have the car?"

Gordon Graham shook his head. "I'm afraid not, tomorrow. Your mother and I were planning to go to Concarneau, to the Fete of the Blue Nets. Remember?"

"*La Fête des Filets Bleus*" was an annual festival held in an old walled city adjoining a lively fishing port. Diane had been going along, too, but Peter's suggestion was more appealing. "Maybe we could go by bus," she said.

"Busses are no fun," Peter argued. "Why can't you get a bicycle for a day. You can ride, can't you?"

"Of course," retorted Diane. "Don't be silly. I've had

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a two-wheeler since I was six years old. But isn't it sort of far?"

Peter looked superior. "Thirty kilometres? That's nothing." He pointed out that in the past fortnight he had been pedaling as many as one hundred kilometers a day.

"Well, if you can do it, I can!" retorted Diane a trifle testily. It was a remark which was to return to haunt her, but she wasn't aware of it at the time.

Sunday was a delicate and beautiful day, with the sky as blue as the Mediterranean, but softened by a commotion of puffy white clouds. Peter arrived on time, but when Diane came downstairs in a pair of linen shorts he shook his head. "You'll have to put on a skirt, I'm afraid."

"Why? A skirt always gets tangled in the spokes," she told him sensibly.

"I can't help it. Customs are different in different places. And you can't go to a Breton house in shorts. Armand's parents would find it shocking, actually."

Diane, by now, was sufficiently seasoned as a traveler to accept this reasoning. But the skirt was cumbersome, and the English bike she had rented was not equipped with a satisfactory wheel guard.

Still, it didn't spoil the fun of riding along the country road Peter had chosen in place of the main highway,

which was crowded with motorcyclists, pedestrians, automobiles and carts on their way from village to village or off for a day by the sea.

Diane felt full of high spirits. The day was cool, the sun was bright and the countryside was old and quiet, with a beauty that bore the imprint of centuries of human history.

"No wonder painters come here," she said, and "No wonder you like to travel by bicycle. You see so much more."

It was true. There was time, on a bike, to really appreciate the beauty of the white embroidered Breton headdresses, which so many of the older matrons wore with great dignity. There were even many traditional costumes, Sunday garb for both men and women who were walking to and fro from the graceful chapels where they worshiped just as their ancestors had, as long ago as the fifteenth century.

In one little village they stopped to watch a procession led by six men playing bagpipes. By the roadside, a few miles further along, Diane picked some gorse and stuck it through the ribbon which bound back her hair. Peter talked about his hosteling experiences and about the marvelous view from the granite promontory of the Pointe du Raz, where water boiled over the shoals and reefs with impressive fury. They sang a little, trying to harmonize, and laughed a lot so that the time passed

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quickly. Before it seemed possible to Diane, they were entering the outskirts of Douarnenez.

They jounced along cobbled streets between white-washed houses which sparkled in the sun like a painting just finished and not yet dry. The port was crowded with sardine trawlers, the hulls of which were orange and green and blue, the brightest colors possible. From every available point—from the masts of the boats and the roofs and windows of houses and cafes—hung a mass of blue nets.

"I never saw such a hazy, romantic sort of color," murmured Diane, stopping to gaze around her. "*Les filets bleus*," she murmured. "No wonder they name a festival for them. Aren't they stunning?"

Peter nodded and smiled, pleased by her appreciation. "You're a satisfactory sort of girl to take on an outing," he said.

"Thank you, kind sir. That's the first compliment you've paid me today," Diane retorted.

"The British aren't as good at that sort of thing as the Italians," Peter teased.

"I could give you lessons," Diane suggested impishly.

"Really?" (Peter made it sound like "rally?") He glanced at his watch. "A great pity we don't have more time."

They had no time whatever, in fact. They hurried to find Armand's house, which was situated flush on a

street which faced the harbor. The windows were hung with starched lace curtains and geraniums bloomed in boxes on the sills.

Madame, Armand's mother, was a plump, plain woman with hair stretched back to a prim knot, but his father was handsome in a weather-beaten, salty kind of way. His skin was ruddy and wind burned, his eyes as blue as the nets which hung from the roof, and it took Diane and Peter not five minutes to discover that he was completely master of his own house as well as the fleet of sardine trawlers which he owned.

"*Déjeuner*," as Armand called it, or "*dîner*," as his father termed it, was served almost at once, to Diane's secret relief. The unaccustomed exercise and the sea air had made her hungrier than she had been in weeks. Monsieur Lassiat led the way into the dining room, seated Diane on his right, Peter on his left, and then spread a large white napkin across his knees while his wife carried in a heavy tureen of steaming soup.

Concocted of something which Diane could translate only as "little red beasts of the sea" the *potage* proved to be delicious. When M. Lassiat offered her a second helping she accepted it happily and consumed it along with three slices of crusty French bread hot from the oven.

In her halting French she told Madame, "This is just the sort of lunch I love!"

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"*Ah, bien,*" said Madame, smiling. "*Vous avez bon appétit!*"

You bet! Diane agreed mentally, then correctly replied, "*Oui, vraiment.*"

Aside from such simple comments concerning the food or the weather, there was not much conversation between the young people and the elder Lassiat. For the first time Diane was aware how completely inadequate her high school French proved when it came to conducting a conversation. There could be no exchange of ideas, except when Armand translated, and this was a laborious process which slowed the progress of the meal and accomplished little.

Meanwhile, Madame, refusing Diane's offer of help, had cleared the soup bowls, replaced them with dinner plates and returned with a large bowl of *haricots verts*. String beans were not among Diane's favorite vegetables, and she had been served them almost daily for the past week, but she accepted a large helping politely and struggled through it, aided by two more thick slices of the delicious bread.

By now she was beginning to feel quite replete. It was a strange lunch, she thought to herself, but filling, and she had to store up energy for the ride back to Quimper. When M. Lassiat pressed a second helping upon her she let him override her first refusal. She didn't want to be rude.

BRITTANY BONUS

Again Madame, unassisted, cleared the table. Again she brought clean dinner plates. Now, to Diane's utter confusion, she entered with a platter of cold lamb and placed it in front of her husband. Convinced, by now, of the American girl's *bon appétit*, Monsieur served Diane with four large slices which looked to her like a portion designed for a truck driver.

"You enjoy the French food, yes?" inquired Madame.

"Oh, yes!" Diane replied bravely, and picked up her fork.

The others seemed to be having no difficulty with the lamb, which was cooked rare and seasoned with garlic, but Diane could eat scarcely half of her serving. Her stomach bulged and her belt cut into her waist. She felt completely stuffed.

"You do not like the way we cook our *agneau*, perhaps?" Madame suggested sorrowfully. "It is not to the American taste?"

Translated by Armand, Diane requested him to reply that it was delicious, perfectly delicious, but Madame was unconvinced. "You are not eating," she protested. "And you have such a fine appetite!"

Diane was sorry. She tried to make up for her default by smiling warmly, and hoped that she would not be required to swallow another mouthful, but she had reckoned without the inevitable *salade* which was the next course. Really uncomfortable by now, she managed

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to masticate only a few leaves of lettuce, though she vastly preferred the delicious fresh greens to those unfortunate string beans.

They had been at table, by now, for more than an hour and a half. M. Lassiat ate slowly, with obvious relish, and drank quantities of wine with each course. Armand kept up a lively conversation with Peter, but Diane grew more and more silent. She was getting sleepy and she couldn't seem to make an effort any longer. It reminded her of the way she felt after too much Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner at home.

Stifling a yawn, she wished beyond anything in the world that she could creep off somewhere and take a short nap. She could imagine herself curled up on a sofa, her head against a cushion. Then she jerked her shoulders and widened her eyes painfully. She didn't dare daydream or she'd fall asleep sitting up.

Madame was once more emerging from the kitchen, bearing aloft still another platter, and once more Diane discovered a clean plate before her on the table. Now came a true Breton specialty, *crêpes* with *confiture*.

To Diane they looked like pancakes, and very ample ones, the size of the buckwheat cakes they served in diners for breakfast, although a good deal thinner and more delicate. The *crêpes* were rolled and filled with jam, and at any other time they would have appealed to her as utterly delectable, but right now they were merely

something else to swallow, something else—sweet and unpalatable—to crowd into her stomach, which felt as though it were packed to the brim.

“Just one, please!” she begged. “I’ve really eaten far too much!”

But by the time Armand had translated, M. Lassiat had placed two of the crepes on her plate and was holding a third in mid-air. Diane turned slightly green. “*Non, non, s’il vous plaît!*” she cried, and Peter looked at her curiously because there was a ring of earnest entreaty in her voice.

Madame, on the other hand, regarded her young guest rather sadly. The meal, her expression said, could not have been a success. Diane knew exactly what her hostess was thinking, but was powerless to explain her problem. It was too difficult to communicate through Armand. It would take too long to apprise his mother of the misapprehension which had led to the present impasse. All she could do was smile wanly and wait to be released.

The time finally came when M. Lassiat was ready to rise from the table. He did so with a satisfied air. He looked genial and relaxed.

But Diane gave a little grunt of pure misery as she got up from her chair. Not only did her stomach feel as tightly packed as an over-sized golf ball; her legs were so stiff she could scarcely straighten her knees. And the

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spot at which she had sat on the saddle of the bicycle was so painful that she winced at the mere thought.

Even Peter noticed her agonized expression. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," she answered, and knew that it was the understatement of her life.

Somehow, feeling as though she were creaking aloud in every joint, she eased herself down to a living room chair and wished that she would never have to arise again. But of course Armand wanted to take them aboard one of his father's trawlers, and she had to get up and go with Peter and the men while Madame steadfastly refused any help in the kitchen.

Walking, Diane realized at once, was going to be a very painful proposition. She felt as though she had been riding horseback for the first time in years. Yet to confess her difficulty to the boys was beyond her ability. She gritted her teeth and climbed over the side of the boat stiffly. If only they wouldn't make her lean or kneel or duck!

It was an idle hope. She had to inspect this or that which could only be viewed in some such contortionist manner. Her muscles screamed, individually and collectively, and she could have consigned M. Lassiat's entire fleet to the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.

This, however, was a veritable heaven in comparison to the place in which she could have wished her bicycle

when, on their return, she saw it leaning innocently against the house. "I think we'd better be starting back," Peter was saying to Armand. "I say, thanks and all that. It's been a perfectly corking day."

"Wonderful," Diane echoed feebly. "Just wonderful." She felt as though she were talking in a nightmare, living through a bad dream.

But eventually all thank-yous were said. "*Merci beaucoup*" and "*merci bien*" and "*merci-merci-merci*" but how in heck was she going to ease herself up on that darned bicycle seat? The saddle bit into her bruised flesh like a rawhide whip and she almost yelled out loud. Her grin was as false as the smile of the Cheshire Cat when she turned to wave good by to Armand.

Peter didn't seem to notice. He rode on ahead, whistling, as though the journey back to Quimper were going to be fun.

Fun! With every revolution of the wheels Diane's agony increased. If she had entertained any notion that she would limber up gradually, it was soon dissipated. "If you can do it I can." Why in the world had she made such a stupid statement? It hadn't occurred to her that Peter was conditioned to pedaling for long hours every day, while she had never spent a more unathletic summer.

"If you can do it I can!" That's what she had said and that's what she had meant. But she was learning a lesson.

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Never again would she pit her prowess against that of any boy.

"Come on, Diane!" Peter called over his shoulder. "You're slowing up. Where's that old zip and zest you showed this morning?"

"Gone with the wind," Diane managed to mumble. "I guess I ate too much lunch."

"I'll race you to the next crossroad," Peter offered as though he hadn't heard her.

"Not for a million dollars," retorted Diane. "That's for twelve-year-olds with stamina."

Peter had slowed up and was riding beside her. "I say, aren't you feeling quite fit?"

The hint of concern in his voice broke down Diane's defenses. She felt her eyes cloud with tears as a loud honk, just behind, made her swerve sharply to the right. She did not see the jagged stone in the road, even when her front wheel hit it head on and she was tossed ignominiously into the gorse. By the time she had raised herself to a sitting position Peter was at her side, his arm supporting her.

"Diane! Are you hurt?"

She shook her head, at the same time fumbling for a handkerchief in her skirt pocket. "I'm sorry," she apologized for no good reason, and blew her nose.

Then she looked up, aware of a whooshing sound,

muted but familiar, and after a moment she realized that it emanated from the front tire of her bike.

"Saved by the bell," she breathed thankfully.

"I beg your pardon?"

Diane smiled. "An Americanism," she explained. "I was just thinking out loud." She got painfully to her feet and dusted herself off. Then she went over to the prostrate bicycle.

But Peter, who had been frightened, was still feeling masculine and protective. "Here, let me." He reached down and raised the bike to its normal position again while Diane watched the airless tire flatten against the ground.

"Oh, dear!" she said, and with a return of feminine artifice made her eyes round and innocent.

"Drat that car!" exclaimed Peter.

"What car?" The mere mention of an automobile sounded sweet to Diane's ears.

"The one that made you turn out. You've got a puncture."

Hallelujah! Diane felt like shouting, but instead she asked, "Will we have to walk the rest of the way to Quimper?"

Peter shook his head. "Just to the next village. There's a bus, once an hour. They'll put our bikes on top, you know. It's done all the time."

Diane breathed a sigh of relief so intense that it sounded

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like a grunt. "How did you know about the bus?" she asked as Peter recovered his own bicycle and they started off.

"I checked, just in case you were too tired to ride back."

"Who, me?" Diane laughed, a high, clear treble that sounded positively joyful. "Who—me?"

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Crowell house had a sprawling, comfortable look which was immediately welcoming.

Peter was on the steps to greet them the moment the Grahams' taxi turned into the gravel drive, and he was followed closely by his mother, a tall, slender woman with straight hair knotted low on her neck and a complete absence of make-up. Until she smiled, Diane found her a trifle formidable, but then she looked just like Peter, and her voice was charming, cultured and with a hint of laughter in it.

Introductions were interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Crowell, a broad-shouldered, tweedy man who stumped out of the house on a wooden leg. Diane found out later that he had been injured in the war and refused to wear what he called "one of those effete artificial limbs." He was very masculine, rather brusque, but genuinely hospitable. "Nice of you to give us a bit of your time," he said. "I know how it is with you Americans when you're traveling. Every minute counts."

Diane's mother laughed. "We're not the sort who do the grand tour," she informed him. "I'm afraid we haven't been on one sightseeing bus in all of Europe. I'm feeling a little guilty about it, in fact."

"Why?" Mr. Crowell wanted to know. "Why should you?"

"Because I'm sure I've missed so much."

Peter's father shrugged. "Everyone gets a different

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value out of travel. I personally prefer people to monuments."

After this remark it seemed to Diane that everything was delightfully easy. She felt sure the grown-ups would get along so she relaxed and grinned at Peter.

"What have you been doing since I saw you last?" she asked as he was carrying her bag upstairs.

"Waiting for you to get here."

"Oh, now!" Diane ducked her head, embarrassed for a moment; then she looked up and smiled. "You sound more like a Frenchman than an English boy when you make remarks like that."

Peter chuckled. "Maybe some of it rubbed off." He led her into a big, chintz-hung bedroom with a fireplace and a canopied bed. "This is where my sister usually sleeps," he explained, "but she's gone off to visit friends in Cornwall for a week."

Diane walked over to the windows which looked out on a stretch of grass which ended where the rocks began. Beyond was the water, gray rather than blue like the Mediterranean, and in the distance was a blur barely distinguishable from the coastline. "What's that?" Diane wanted to know.

"The Isle of Wight," Peter told her, and she repeated it after him. "You know," she said, turning from the window, "I still have to pinch myself every once in a while. To believe I'm here. It's like you're saying now—

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just casually—the Isle of Wight. It's a name out of a geography book, or a novel, not a name out of real life." She cocked her head, looking up at him. "Did you feel that way when you went to school in America?"

Peter thought for a moment. "No. Not quite. New York was like the pictures of course. 'Fabulous,' as you say. But remember, I went to school in New England, and all that country was strange to me." Then he changed the subject abruptly. "Get into a pullover and some flat heels and I'll show you a thing or two." He glanced at his watch. "We'll have to hurry if we want to be back for tea."

Outside, the wind was whipping clouds across the sky and waves were creaming against the rocks and throwing sharp needles of spray towards the path which led along their summit. Diane's hair blew straight back from her head and she felt like running from sheer exhilaration.

"This is a wonderful spot," she said, "but you can't swim here, can you? Isn't it dangerous?"

Peter nodded. "But there's a little cove around the bend—"

He showed it to her, a sheltered spot, and told her how they picnicked on the stony beach in warm weather, and how he had played in the tide pools as a child. There was something about being here with Peter—here in the place he had spent his summers ever since he was a baby—

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that made Diane feel as though she knew him better than ever before.

"You love it, don't you?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! The flat in London is nothing by comparison."

Diane fingered her charm bracelet and said, "It doesn't seem possible, standing here with you, that I'll be leaving England tomorrow."

"You haven't been here any time at all, actually."

"Two months."

"On the continent, mostly. That's not England," Peter reminded her. "We've had a jolly good time together, haven't we though?"

"Tops," Diane said. "I'll miss you, Peter."

"I, too. You'll write?"

"Yes," Diane promised. "Or at least I'll try." She always edged away from the subject of correspondence. Letter writing was not her forte.

"And you'll come back," Peter said firmly, as though he were trying to convince himself by the sound of his own words.

"I'm not at all sure." Diane glanced down at the charm bracelet again, stroking the bauble Peter had given her. She didn't want to feel sentimental. She didn't want it to be hard to say good-by. Concentrate on how good it will be to get home, she told herself. Think about Jim. Think about Toby. But Peter was here, standing beside

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her, his fair hair wind-tossed, his eyes earnest and appealing.

Suddenly Diane reached out and took his hand. "Come on!" she said. "You wanted to be back in time for tea."

To Diane's delight, it was a typically English tea, served from a round table covered with a linen and lace cloth. The service was silver, the china was thin and flowered, the cucumber sandwiches were cold and crisp and the scones were hot.

By now the Grahams and the Crowells were on easy conversational terms with one another. There were several meeting grounds—Peter's year in the United States, the Grahams' experiences on the continent and their various reactions to driving an English car.

Although it was August, the late afternoon was cool, and there was a fire in the huge entrance-hall fireplace, concerning which Diane asked Peter, "Goodness, what did they ever cook in here? Roast cow?"

Peter laughed. "Perhaps. You should see the ones at Mont San Michele. I think they used those for roast monk."

Overhearing, Mrs. Crowell put a hand to her forehead. "This is the effect of your American sense of humor, Diane. Don't blame it on us."

But there was no malice in her teasing, no underlying

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criticism. Diane was as sure that the Crowells enjoyed her family as she was that she enjoyed Peter's.

After tea everyone separated for a while, to nap or go walking or change for dinner, which was served by an Irish woman whom Peter called "Nannie" and who acted more like a member of the family than like a servant in the house.

In the evening the adults played bridge and Peter taught Diane how to play cribbage, a game at which she felt sure she would never learn to excel. A thunderstorm, which had been brewing since the late afternoon, roared in from the island and burst over their heads about nine, but by ten-thirty it had blown itself out and the moon was once more peeping through the clouds when Diane went up to bed.

She undressed sleepily, shivering a little. As she had always heard, these big English houses were damp. In the winter she'd bet they were freezing, with no "central heating," as they called it. No wonder it was necessary to move to a flat in London, although she had learned that Mr. Crowell was a writer and could work anywhere at all.

Yawning, Diane scurried across the floor and opened the window gingerly, and only because she thought she should. Then she ran back to crawl between the cold linen sheets.

It took her a while to warm up, and she lay on her

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back, staring drowsily at the canopy arching above her head. It was a huge bed, with great square carved posts, like the one in the Tussaud tableau of the Little Princes in the Tower. The thought made her shudder slightly, but she reminded herself that probably there were thousands of such beds in England—maybe others in this very house.

Turning on her side, she pulled a pillow down from the inevitable underpinning of the bolster and started to snuggle into it when she became aware of a noise overhead. There was a definite tapping, spaced very evenly, at intervals of perhaps a second, and it seemed to be coming from the ceiling directly over the bed.

Tap . . . tap . . . tap.

Diane lay and listened. Tap . . . tap . . . tap. It could, she reasoned, be the knocking of a peg upon the floor above—and she remembered Mr. Crowell's wooden leg. Quite rhythmically it continued. Tap . . . tap . . . tap. What could he be doing, she wondered, marching back and forth across a room on the third floor this late at night? Unless he had a study up there, a workroom. Of course! That must be it.

She burrowed deeper into her pillow, wondering why only the tapping sounded through the floor, why there was no alternating footfall. Besides, if he were writing, wouldn't he be sitting? Of course, it might be that he was composing. She supposed then he might pace up and

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down. Diane yawned again, more wearily, and gave up trying to figure the problem out because the effort involved was just too great. In the midst of wondering she drifted off to sleep.

It was precisely midnight, according to the luminous hands on the dial of her new Swiss watch, when Diane awakened with a start. She had the definite impression that there was someone in the room with her.

"Mother!" she called softly, but there was no answer. "Mother, is that you?"

Mrs. Graham was in the habit of looking in upon her daughter before she herself went to bed, and Diane was accustomed to rousing slightly when she became aware of her presence, but tonight there was no answering, "Yes, dear," no murmured "good night, honey," or suggestion of "pleasant dreams."

"Mother!" she called again, and her own voice sounded oddly apprehensive in the darkness. She could feel her muscles grow tense and her mind quicken. Was there someone here or was she imagining things?

Twisting her head ever so slightly, her eyes searched the room. The pale moon fingered the dressing table, lighted on her traveling bag open on the luggage rack and ducked beneath the canopy of the bed to rest lingeringly on the coverlet, but nothing moved in the shadows beyond the area it touched.

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Yet Diane, in spite of herself, lay momentarily petrified. It was almost as though she could hear someone breathing, and yet her ears denied it. Don't be ridiculous, she told herself. It's just that the house is strange—and probably you awakened in the midst of a nightmare. But she could remember no dream.

Very deliberately she tried to reason herself back into a feeling of security. There are all sorts of creakings and groanings in these old houses, she told herself. Right now the wind—it must be the wind!—in the fireplace chimney was making the most astonishing sound.

"Whoo," it seemed to breathe. "Whooooo-whoosh." Yet the long white embroidered curtains at the window never fluttered, and outside the limbs of a fir tree stood like stiff sentinels at attention against the silvery light.

Drafts, Diane decided—down-drafts—could be tricky things. A more superstitious girl might be terrified, imagining all sorts of foolishness, but not she! Lying on her back she remembered a night long ago, when she and Nonnie had been children of eight or nine and had been spending the week-end at a huge old-fashioned seashore house rented by the Jameses. It had been a moonlit night, just like this, with the surf rolling and pounding against the sand and the Victorian furniture making weird patterns on the floor. Together, they had huddled in the black walnut bed, telling one another ghost stories until they had worked themselves into a

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state of utter terror, until their teeth chattered and they clutched each other, anticipating they knew not what.

Diane smiled at the thought and told herself that all she had to do now was relax. She was aware that anyone—even a girl who was sixteen years old and practically grown up—could become enslaved by an overactive imagination. But superstition was not in her line. Black cats would cross her path and she never noticed. She could walk under a ladder without a qualm. She might shudder deliciously over a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, but she was not the sort of person who worried over the possibility of the supernatural. No indeed! Diane was too sensible, too well adjusted, for anything of that sort.

Then why couldn't she go back to sleep? Indignant at her own inability to drift off from sheer force of will, Diane frowned and punched her pillow into a more slumber-inducing shape. She had heard that some people became moon-struck, that on certain nights they always were wakeful, but she had never experienced any such difficulty. Still, it might help to draw the draperies closed against the light.

Then why didn't she get up and do it? Why did she huddle here, her knees drawn up, her arms tense against her sides? Was it because there was something alarming in the drip of water, so steady and regular, which had added itself to the night sounds?

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She tried to grin. Now we have "drip-drip-drip" instead of "tap-tap-tap," she told herself. At least there's no dog barking. I should be grateful for that. And there's no real reason why water shouldn't be dripping, actually. We did have a violent rainstorm. And probably the gutters on a house this old get clogged up.

It did seem as though the dripping sound came from behind her head, however, and not from outside the window. Perhaps there was a bathroom next door. She hadn't really noticed. Or pipes might run through this wall to the upper story. Who cared, anyway? All she wanted to do was to get back to sleep.

But this seemed to be impossible. Perhaps, she thought as she tossed and turned and readjusted the covers, I'm excited about sailing tomorrow. Maybe I'm just so full of anticipation I'm restless. Maybe it would help if I'd turn on a light and read for a while.

Then she remembered that there was no lamp on the bedside table, and that most English houses didn't provide them because the British didn't share the American habit of reading in bed.

Of course, she could count sheep. That sometimes helped. Or she might even concentrate on that confounded water dripping. It was certainly monotonous enough. She pulled an arm free and looked at her wrist watch again. One thirty. This was ridiculous! She had been awake for a whole hour and a half.

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Angry enough at herself to be jolted into action, Diane threw back the bedclothes and stamped across to the open window, from which she could see the moonlight slanting down upon the lawn. A row of gaunt thorns at its perimeter all leaned in one direction, testifying to the power of the winter wind, but near the house the fir remained motionless, although the whooshing noise in the chimney hadn't stopped.

In the distance an owl hooted and Diane listened, standing there at the window in her pajamas. If I allowed myself, she thought, I could get the heeby-jeebies. It was such an eerie, mournful sound.

Then a shadow crossed the moon, starting out from the fir tree, and Diane stepped back a pace, shivering. Her hand groped for the curtain pull and she yanked it, then fled back to bed, huddling into the warm spot left by her body, wishing she wouldn't tremble, wouldn't react like a baby just because she was alone in the dark.

The shadow must have been a bat, of course. Nasty, nocturnal creatures! But far from dangerous. All the bat stories she had heard as a child were old wives' tales, she was sure.

There had been an article last year, in a magazine, about a man who made a study of bats and had discovered an albino. An albino bat. That was a curious thing.

Oh, stop thinking and get to sleep, Diane told herself sternly. She tried to yawn, to get herself in the mood,

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but just at that moment the tapping upstairs started again, at more widely spaced intervals now.

"Tap . . . tap." She could count to four between them. "Tap . . . tap . . . tap—one-two-three-four—tap."

When Diane came into the dining room her father was helping himself to scrambled eggs from a covered dish on the sideboard and her mother was already sipping coffee.

Peter, in the midst of buttering a piece of toast, pushed back his chair and stood up.

"Good morning! What can I get for you? Coffee or tea?"

"I think I'd like some coffee," Diane said, although she seldom drank it. "Maybe it will wake me up."

"You do look sleepy," her mother murmured, and Mrs. Crowell asked, solicitously, "Weren't you comfortable, my dear?"

"Oh, yes, Diane said, "I was quite comfortable, only—"

"Only what?" Mr. Crowell broke in as he came into the room and joined Diane at the buffet.

Diane giggled rather nervously, because the word had slipped out and betrayed her. "Oh, nothing," she protested. "You know how it is when the moon is full."

"A full moon has never kept you awake yet!" boomed Mr. Graham to Diane's embarrassment. "Must have been something more than that."

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Everyone looked her way, so that Diane felt trapped. "I'll confess," she said, trying to make light of the situation. "I must have had a nightmare. Anyway, I awakened around midnight and began hearing things."

Peter glanced at his parents, then back at their young guest. "What sort of things?" he probed.

Diane squirmed. "Oh, you know—an owl—water dripping—"

"Water dripping," repeated Peter thoughtfully, and munched on a piece of toast liberally spread with marmalade. "You didn't, by any chance, hear a sort of tapping on the ceiling above your bed?"

Diane paused in the act of putting sugar in her coffee. "As a matter of fact," she said, "I did." She turned to Mr. Crowell. "I decided you must have a workroom on the third floor."

To her surprise, the Englishman shook his head. He looked at his son and grinned. "Shall we tell her?" he asked.

Peter put up a cautionary finger. "Let's see if she got the full treatment."

"That must be an expression he picked up in the States," murmured Mrs. Crowell in an aside to Mrs. Graham.

"The full treatment?" Diane was repeating. "What do you mean?"

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Peter had stopped eating. "Did you, by any chance, hear a sort of sighing in the chimney?"

Diane put down her cup, vexed, and showing it. "If you were playing games, Peter, I don't think—"

But Mr. Crowell put up his hand. "Peter had nothing to do with it, I can assure you. That was our ghost."

"Your—what?" Diane pushed back her chair, feeling beset and baited.

"I'm quite serious," her host insisted. "We inherited him—our ghost, you know—with the house."

Diane implored her mother for help, silently. She felt quite unable to cope. But it was her father who came to her rescue.

"Him?" he asked.

"Rather!" said Peter. "Pater and I agree it is definitely a male shade. A female would be more subtle about things, you know."

"As a matter of fact," Mrs. Crowell put in conversationally, "I think he's a ghost of a certain sea captain in my family. A rude old fellow, really. Not the sort of ancestor one brags about."

"But like me," mentioned Mr. Crowell, "he had lost a leg."

"He never walks in the dark of the moon," said Peter to Diane, as though he were discussing something perfectly commonplace, like the distance to Southampton. "If you'd come a few days later you'd have missed him."

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"So I suppose I should feel lucky?" Diane asked.

"Well," Peter confessed, "I should, but I don't know about girls."

"I know about this girl," Diane said. "I don't feel lucky. I feel doggoned sleepy, and if I had had any idea all that noisemaking wasn't due to natural phenomena I'd have done a little haunting myself!"

Peter laughed because she looked so belligerent, and consequently, so full of fire and life. "You can come back and haunt me any time you like," he promised under cover of the adult laughter. And at that moment, to both of them, the Atlantic Ocean which was visible beyond the windows, seemed very much too broad.

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somehow, more worldly. She could walk into a room of strangers, now, without embarrassment. She had learned to handle herself in an emergency. She knew her way around hotels.

And she had acquired a further mark of prestige, an English beau. Dear Peter! She'd never forget him, but she wondered, in spite of their promises, whether they'd ever write more than Christmas cards. An ocean was so formidable, somehow—so vast. And letter-friendships could grow as thin as the paper that was folded into air-mail envelopes.

Her friends at home, on the other hand, were flesh and blood and she was simply dying to see them and tell them all about everything, including Peter, of course. There was so much to say she'd scarcely know how to begin. It would take hours, even days! The last week before the beginning of school would be crowded to the brim.

Impatience mounted when she awakened the next morning, until Diane felt that she could scarcely bear it. The ship slowed to a crawl as it inched up the Hudson, and the tugs took forever to edge her into the dock. Then there was an endless wait while vaccination certificates and passports were checked, and another delay for customs inspection, which was very deliberate and thorough. Finally, at the crucial moment, just when they were cleared and ready, all available porters disappeared,

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and Diane volunteered to carry their baggage herself, on her head, if necessary.

"Just let's get out of here!" she wailed.

The train was even more maddeningly slow than the ship. It crept, breathing heavily, along the rails which led away from New York, while Diane tapped her foot, clasped and unclasped her nervous hands and inspected her face a dozen times in the mirror of her compact. Time seemed to be standing still.

When they changed to a local at last, and the familiar suburban station, dingy and deserted in the early afternoon, came into sight, Diane almost jumped up and down from excitement. Cranford looked exactly the same as always, yet entirely different. It was as though she were stepping back into a previous incarnation, another life!

"The trees look so green!" she exclaimed as their taxi turned into Beechtree Road from Elm Street. Her heart did a queer little flip and she felt as though she were going to choke.

Her mother was almost as excited. "Everything has grown so!" she cried when the house and the garden came into sight. "Oh, Gordon, it was lovely to go away, but it's good to be back!"

Diane tumbled out of the cab with the impetuosity of a ten-year-old and started to call "Here, Honey!" before she was half-way up the flagstone walk. The collie came from the back of the Roberts' house at a mad gal-

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lop, and his mistress dropped to her knees on the grass and gathered him, like a Gargantuan fur muff, in her arms.

Jim did not appear. He was working, she supposed. And the fact that the Roberts' car was not parked in the drive probably meant there was nobody at home. But Jim could wait. Now Diane just wanted to walk into her own house with her collie at her heels and feel the familiarity of it all.

It was remarkable how pretty the living room looked. The scatter-rugs didn't seem nearly so worn as she remembered nor the wing chair so shabby. Instead, the room looked hospitable and gay, with its wide, welcoming fireplace and crowded bookshelves.

Mrs. Graham tossed her hat on a table with a happy sigh and dropped down to sit on the sofa and fill her eyes. "Isn't this luxurious!" she murmured half to Diane and half to herself. "And aren't we lucky to be Americans!"

"Be it ever so humble—" Mr. Graham started to whistle, but his eyes were shining, and when Honey frisked over to be caressed he grinned and bent down for a moment to bury his face in the collie's ruff.

"The feeling is apparently mutual," Diane said, after a few seconds. Then, with the resilience of sixteen summers, she jumped to her feet. "We don't have to unpack right away, do we? I want to look up the gang."

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She phoned Nonnie first, as behooved a "best friend." But it was mid-afternoon, on the last day of August, and she quickly learned that Nonnie was at the Field Club, where they were playing off the semi-finals of the junior tennis matches. So of course that was where most of the crowd would be.

Changing quickly from her traveling dress to a pair of Bermuda shorts and a shirt, Diane inspected herself critically before she set forth. Her hair was longer and newly bleached by the sun on the Brittany coast. She hoped it was becoming. Otherwise she couldn't see that she was much changed since June. Sophistication, naturally, didn't show.

The family raised no objection to her dashing off immediately. It was what they had expected, and they understood her impatience.

"You're sure you don't need me?" she remembered to ask.

And she fully expected her mother's reply. "No, indeed. Have fun!"

The day was fine, and rather breezy, with a hint of fall in the air, and the walk to the Field Club was short. Diane ran the last block from sheer exuberance, but slowed to a more dignified pace when she came within sight of the courts. After all, she didn't want to seem too anxious. She was now a girl who had been places and done things.

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Nonnie was coming down the clubhouse steps with Stubby Sawyer just as Diane started to cut across the grass. She glanced her way carelessly, did a double-take, then squealed in surprise and started running.

"Diane! I didn't think you'd get in until tonight! Did you have a simply divine time?"

"Marvelous!" Diane returned Nonnie's hug and shook Stubby's tennis racket in place of his hand. "How are you?" she grinned. "You know, it's positively weird, but you haven't changed a bit!"

Nonnie linked her arm through Diane's and drew her toward the green benches that faced the courts. "I'm simply perishing to hear all about it—everything! What country did you like best?"

"Well—" started Diane in a considering tone of voice, "I'd say—" But what she would have said never materialized because Alice James and Sarah Jane Corwin spied them and scurried across the lawn like two excited hen pheasants.

"Darling! Did you have a really dreamy time?" called Alice at once.

"It couldn't have been more fun!" replied Diane. "Heavens, you're brown! How was camp?"

"Ghastly. Utterly ghastly," said Sarah Jane.

"Children," said Alice, shutting her eyes and wrinkling her nose, "Ugh. I've decided to become an old maid."

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Stubby laughed. "Fat chance."

"Tell us everything," Sissy cut in. "Did you meet any fascinating foreigners? I mean male, of course."

"And is it true," asked Alice, "that Italian men follow you in the streets? There was an article in the *Post*—"

"Oh, I can't bear it!" Sarah Jane cried. "While we played nursemaid to those little monsters at Minnehaha, Diane was learning all about Life. If anybody ever persuades me to be a counselor again I should have my head examined!"

"You've no idea, Diane. It was the End." As they found a place on the benches Alice launched into a *sotto voce* description of the trials and tribulations they had endured.

Then Stubby said, "Sh! You're not supposed to talk during play," and they all turned their attention to the court where Christine White and Bill Keith were matched against Barbara Blake and Randy Curtis. Christine, Diane noticed, looked as lovely as ever. Her eyes seemed even more violet than she remembered, her figure more lithe and slender. As usual, she was concentrating completely on her game, and it was no surprise when the Keith-White team won the second straight set. They were good!

Later, on the clubhouse porch, Diane congratulated her. "Thanks," Chris spoke warmly. "I've been working like a beaver all summer," she confessed. "I've practically

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lived at the courts. Did you get any tennis in Europe, or was it all museums and scenery?"

"No indeed!" Diane laughed. "As a matter of fact—"

But Bill Keith interrupted. "Have a coke, Diane? Or have you graduated to the champagne class now?"

"Do the European children really drink wine instead of milk, the way they say?" asked Barbara Blake, then turned to Bill without waiting for an answer. "Bring me a ginger ale if you can find one, like a lamb. I just can't wait to hear details. Of course I'm positively green-eyed about it all. Who wouldn't be?"

"Have you heard about Toby Cook?" Randy Curtis interrupted.

"I haven't heard anything," Diane confessed. "I just got home an hour ago."

"He's off on a two-week cruise in New England somewhere—on a forty-foot sailboat, no less."

Diane felt a little let down, though she couldn't have told why. "Friends of his family's?" she asked.

Alice James nodded. "Though I did hear there was a girl involved. Only fifteen, but she goes to boarding school."

"Oh," Diane accepted the coke which Bill handed her and tried to sound offhand.

"I got a snapshot from him a couple of days ago," Stubby mentioned. "She looks terrific, for my money. Really stacked."

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"But Toby's ready for college," Nonnie cut in loyally, "and fifteen is terribly immature."

Diane tried to remember how immature she had felt this time last year and was unconvinced. "How about Jim?" she dared to ask.

"He quits work tonight," Stubby offered. "And will he be glad!"

That's something, anyway, Diane thought, but she merely said, "Honey looks wonderful. He practically knocked me down when I got home."

Then she realized, with some embarrassment, that the Cranford crowd had progressed beyond talk of dogs. She was reverting, forgetting, and this was a *faux pas* because they were practically grown up now, and had put away such childish subjects of conversation. Europe was a safer bet.

But though everyone asked, nobody seemed to have time to listen to the interesting things that had happened to her in Europe. One and all, they wanted to make sure she had had a wonderful time, but then their own affairs caught them up again. The present moment was more fascinating than any unshared past.

True, as Nonnie and Diane walked home together, loitering along Elm Street as they had so many afternoons in the past, Nonnie said insistently, "You must come over tomorrow and sit down and really give. I want to know about London and Paris and Rome and

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Peter and everything that happened along the way. I can't believe you've really been there yet."

"I have," Diane said a trifle ruefully, "and I'd love to tell you something about it—when we have more time."

Nonnie nodded encouragingly, but with a certain inattentiveness. "Time," she sighed. "Isn't it awful, actually? Here we have only a week before school starts and a million things to do."

"I have to unpack. That's about all," Diane mentioned.

"It's too bad Toby's away," Nonnie commiserated, "but Jim will be dying to see you. I bet he'll pump you until you're positively hoarse. He kept saying that your letters didn't tell him anything."

"I'm the postcard type," Diane confessed. "I guess I'm allergic to a blank sheet of paper."

She found herself, by the moment, growing more and more anxious to find out whether Jim was home yet. She was glad he was giving up his summer job today. They'd have time to loaf and swim and catch up with each other.

Nonnie left her at the yarn shop where she had to pick up a sweater that was being blocked, and Diane hurried on down Elm Street until she reached Wilson's, the social shrine of the high school crowd. The drug-store was empty, except for a boy whose familiar long legs were wrapped around a soda fountain stool. Diane,

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her heart pumping, tiptoed through the door and approached him noiselessly.

A year ago, she thought, I'd have put my hands over his eyes and said, "Guess!" But not now. Now the hunched back looked too broad, the head too masculine and adult, for such foolishness. Attacked by a sense of shyness she could not explain, Diane simply stood behind him and said, "Jim" very softly.

He whirled around, his eyes at first startled, then full of delighted surprise. Sliding down off the stool he took her hands, squeezing them until they hurt. "Diane!" he cried. "I thought you were coming home tonight. I never expected—"

She smiled. "We made an early train. Jim, thank you for taking care of Honey. He looks wonderful."

"So do you. Climb up here and let me buy you a malted or something. We can celebrate! I go on vacation tonight."

"So Nonnie told me. Has it been a long summer?"

Jim looked at her meaningfully. "What do you think?"

Diane lowered her lashes. Faithful, endearing Jim! It was lovely to be missed, to be needed. She became filled with a quivering sort of happiness, as though this were the climax to the trip as well as to the day.

"I think it's grand to be home," she said, looking up.

Jim waited until the milkshake had been set before

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her. "I want to hear all about it, right from the beginning," he told her.

"When shall I begin?" asked Diane with a grin that was privately mischievous.

"Right now. Was the boat as good as it looked?"

"Oh, yes!" Diane said. "It was great fun. There was dancing every night and—"

"Say," Jim interrupted, "before you get started,—there's a square dance at the Field Club Saturday night. I hope you can go with me."

"I'd love to," Diane said sincerely. "Do we dress up?"

"The usual," Jim told her. "Something 'peasanty,' as you gals call it. They're importing an awfully good caller. It should be a real wing-ding."

"Has it been gay around here, while I've been away?" Diane wanted to know.

Jim shrugged. "So-so. Christine had a party in the barn one Saturday night that was a wow. Ended up with the gang going swimming at midnight. You know. One of those."

"What else have you been doing?"

"Working. Taking care of Honey-pot."

"Was he much trouble, aside from feeding?"

Jim shook his head. "Had a touch of summer eczema in July. That wasn't much fun."

"He looks wonderful now."

"Thanks. I think so, too." Sipping the last of his drink

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through a rather tired straw, he glanced sideways at Diane. "Did he remember you?"

"Of course!" Diane flared, then realized that he was teasing. To change the subject she said, "I brought you a present. I'll give it to you tonight."

"What is it?"

She wouldn't tell him. "Wait and see."

"Come on, then. If you're finished, let's get on home."

Twice, as they walked together toward Beechtree Road, Diane tried to reopen the subject of her trip to Europe. She was so filled with the wonder of it, so saturated with the countries she had seen and the people she had met that she wanted to share her experience, to pour it forth, to give what she could of it to her friends. But like the rest, though Jim's intentions were good, he scarcely let her get a word in edgewise. So much was happening in Cranford—or had happened or was about to happen. This was immediate; this was important; Diane had to hear this first!

He talked and talked, and Diane didn't mind, really. She was so glad to see him, and obviously he was overjoyed to see her. But she couldn't help feeling a trifle indignant, as she walked up to her own front door, at the thought that not once during the entire afternoon had she been able to utter a single sentence concerning her grand tour. People asked, but they didn't really want an

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answer. They didn't have time to listen because life was skipping along too fast.

Maybe it's just our age, she thought to herself as she walked into the living room, where her mother was sitting on the couch while Mrs. Roberts perched on the arm of the wing chair.

"Hello, dear! How are you? You do look positively blooming!" Jim's mother jumped up and planted a kiss on Diane's forehead. "I've just been asking Marcia all about Europe. It seems you've had the most exciting time!"

"We have," Diane started, but immediately Mrs. Roberts glanced at her watch. "Heavens, I've got to run," she cried. "I didn't realize it was so late."

Amid the flurry of good-bys Diane was aware that her mother looked a trifle preoccupied, even rueful. "What's the matter, Mommy?" she asked when they were alone.

"Nothing, my love," said Mrs. Graham. "Except that I learn something new every day."

"Today what?" asked Diane.

"Never," said Mrs. Graham firmly, "try to tell anybody about your trip to Europe. It would be a great mistake."

Diane's laughter peeled out and filled the room. She went over to where her mother was standing and put her arms around her, snuggling her nose into the curve of her neck. "I found that out too, Mommy. To be honest,

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I was sort of offended, but I guess it's just the way people are."

Mrs. Graham smiled. "People are nice though. And it's awfully good to be home."

Diane nodded. "You bet. And there's one thing; you can talk to Daddy and me about Europe, and I can talk to the two of you. It's something we can share as a family, forever and ever. Did you ever think of that?"

"*Toujours*," murmured Marcia Graham softly. "*Toujours*, Diane."

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